THE

DARK LADY OF DOONA.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"STORIES OF WATERLOO," "WILD SPORTS OF THE WEST," ETC.

Such was the eye that won my love
And thrilled me with its very glance;
And such the form that once could move;
The voice could charm, the smile entrance.

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THE

DARK LADY OF DOONA

CHAPTER I.

It was late in the autumn of 1601. The harvest-moon was at the full — the serf had retired to his hut, and the hunter returned from the mountain; — evening had suspended the varied business of human life — the peasant maid listened to tale and ballad — the harper played in the castle hall — the lover mused upon his absent lady — and the hermit told his last bead and lay down to rest upon his couch of rushes.

No scene could be fairer than that viewed by the warder from the battlements of Doona. The long and sullen swell of the Atlantic broke upon the sandy beach beneath him, and the yellow beam of night danced merrily upon the luminous waters; on the left, Slievemore threw its gigantic shadow across the moonlit bay, and on the right, the hill of Tarmon appeared in dusky distance; farther on, the island of Devilawn was dimly visible, and, fainter yet, the Black Rock peeped over the glittering ocean, like a small dark spot upon the surface of a sparkling mirror.

The castle of Doona exhibited, in its arrangement and masonry, a specimen of very early architecture. A large square keep of five stories was connected with flanking towers of less size, and encompassed by a deep fosse. On the land side, the entrance was defended by the turrets rising at either side of the embattled gateway; and seaward, there was a narrow postern, communicating with a rude jetty, which admitted boats and small-sized vessels to unload. The natural strength of the place might, at first sight, appear inconsiderable; but for several miles, the coast offered no other landing-place but the point on which the building was erected; and the country, for a considerable distance, being covered with wood, and interrupted by dangerous morasses, opposed insurmountable obstacles to a stranger. Much care also had been bestowed in strengthening this rude fortress. The ditch was broad, and, from its contiguity to the sea, always filled with water; the battlements were well provided with wall-pieces, and ancient engines of defence; and the outer buildings, drilled with numerous shot-holes, rendered a hostile approach obnoxious to the bolts and missiles of those within. Doona, for several centuries, had been the residence of the chieftains of the wild district around it. From the insecurity of property in those perilous times, it had often changed owners, and had successively belonged to the Sullivans, the Dohertys, and the Macmahons. Twelve years before the opening of this story, it had been surprised by a female, celebrated in Irish chronicles, and had since continued the favourite abode of Grace O'Malley, better known, in national traditions, by the appellation of "Graimia Uile."

This singular woman for many years exercised a despotic sovereignty over a large portion of the north-western coast. Her existence is well

authenticated by historians; and her visit to the court of Elizabeth, her predatory habits, and perilous exploits, form yet the theme of ballads, and the subject of the wildest legends of the Irish peasantry. The ruins of her places of strength, in the islands, and on the main, are numerous; and the castles of Clare Island, Kildamnit, Carrig-a-howla, and Doona, still standing, prove that the possessions and power of this wild personage were once considerable.

On the evening we have described, the *Ban Oussel Dhu* (the Black Lady) was sitting in an upper story of the ancient keep. Her companions, a lovely girl of eighteen, with two others of inferior rank, busied in some feminine occupation, plied their needles diligently, by the light of tapers made of the tallow of goats and deer. They sat at some distance from the dark lady, pursuing their task in silence, or occasionally conversing in low whispers. The chamber was large and comfortless; the wood fire was built upon the hearth, and the unsteady flaring of the candles proved that the casements were not impervious to the chilling influence of the night wind. Yet this was the room of state; and the furniture and decorations formed a strange and anomalous display. Against the gray unplastered walls several rare paintings were suspended; the vaulted floor was in some places visible, and in others concealed by costly carpets; articles of foreign luxury were interspersed with garniture of the simplest fashion; and Milan armour, rapiers of rich device, and newly-invented fire-arms, intermingled with Irish weapons of a rude character, and yet ruder workmanship. Every thing in the apartment was wild and incongruous; and the air and mood of the lady of the castle was in perfect keeping with the strange picture her chamber of state presented.

The lady had passed her fiftieth year. Far above the common height of women, her limbs were of masculine proportions, but although the scale was large, their symmetry was unexceptionable. There was a daring and commanding character in her look, that would have better suited a noble of the pale, than a person of the softer sex; and yet, at times, when her features unbent, during casual moments of placid recollections, some traits of womanly beauty might still be traced in the ruins of an intelligent, if not a once handsome countenance. The forehead was finely expanded, a sparkling eye of the deepest black was surmounted by dark brows, which a life of care and danger had contracted — and her raven locks, thrown back in large masses, were secured by a blood-red binder; a yellow manteau, confined by a silken girdle at the waist, and reaching mid-leg down. met sandals of undressed deer-skin, and a robe of purple cloth, loosely thrown across her bare arms, became well the high and haughty figure it enveloped.

If her dress was womanly, there were other appendages that were unsuited to her sex. From the girdle hung a bunch of keys of ponderous dimensions, and a sheathless weapon, a straight and double-edged knife, glittered in her breast, and was visible whenever her robe expanded.

To the bold and repulsive figure of the dark lady, the timid beauty of the young girl formed a striking contrast. The light and airy figure, moulded in the truest outlines of female loveliness — the rounded arm — the long and delicate hand, would have been a fitting study for the artist's pencil. Where her white robe parted, a foot of exquisite proportion peeped out, and every movement of body and limb told how perfectly nature had formed her masterpiece. Eyes of soft and gentle hazel — hair of the deepest chesnut — a full red lip, and teeth of the hue of pearl, completed a countenance of unconscious and surpassing beauty. Her silken dress differed from that of her companions, and seemed cut in the fashion of another land. Her ornaments were few, comprehending golden bracelets, a rosary of precious stones, and a relic of matchless virtue.

The attendants were young and well-featured. Their short boddice and petticoat were of bright colours, the produce of a native loom — rude slippers, and a snood worn by unmarried females, finished their attire.

Seated in a high-backed oaken chair, whose black wood and grotesque carving bespoke it coeval with the building; the lady's foot rested on a low stool, her searching eye one while gazing on the pine-wood fire, and again turning to the narrow casement which opened towards the sea. Her mind seemed intensely occupied. At times she preserved a moody silence, or muttered words unintelligible to her young companions, the evident outbreakings of a bosom harassed by tempestuous thoughts. Suddenly starting from the chair, she strode to the window, and having looked for a few minutes on the moon-lit ocean, returned to the fire, ejaculating in a low but distinct voice — "What the foul fiend detains the *Ommadawn Worouski?*" As she spoke, the sound of a heavy footstep was heard descending from the platform of the tower, the door opened, and an armed figure stood upon the threshold.

"There is a light upon the beacon of Tarmon, lady," said the warder.

"Ha! a vessel coming in — my galleys sailed but yesterday. Who may this stranger be? — Watch, Bryan, if the signal be repeated!" She hastened to the casement. "The blaze burns steadily — it is but a single sail. Go, Una, tell Naughton to reply to the warning fire. — Would that Worouski were safely back," she continued. — "Surely none would harm the fool — lack of wit has hitherto been his security, and I trust it will not fail him now."

The fair girl, who had hitherto remained silent, ventured, in a timid voice, to interrogate the lady, and asked, "Was the business of much import with which the *Ommadawn** had been intrusted?"

"By Saint Bride! the question is most pertinent. Thyself, Inez, caused his journey — Yes, thou — leave us, Kathleen," and waving her hand impatiently, the attendant left the chamber.

A momentary silence followed. That dark and suspicious thoughts were conflicting in the lady's breast, might be gathered from the doubtful mutterings which reached the ear of the listening girl. "I was wrong to trust the Ommadawn. The monk was absent — and who but a priest or a fool were fitting messengers on such a goodly errand — the disposal of a woman's hand!" and her lip curled in high scorn. "Curse on yon absent shaveling — when is his presence sure but at times of festival? wine and venison are beyond his powers of resistance — and the weak dotard would expiate forgotten rosaries, and broken fasts, by toiling his fat carcass to the summit of Cragh Patrick — Pshaw! out upon such holy jugglery! Have I any traitor near my person? My fellows are true, but are those who were once the Red Macmahons to be trusted? I spared but *three*, — the fool, the monk, and the minstrel; they dare not but be honest. Diarmid has reckoned eighty summers — the harp is all he thinks of; let him but dream a few short years in peace — aye, that is all his care. What of the monk? What is there to shake his fidelity? and where could he exchange his quarters for the better? In Doona, masses are few and wine-butts plenty. He has no holy vanity — cell and sackcloth were little to his taste; and for harp and ballad, he would leave the hymn and organ. Give him the warm nook, and one merry round at midnight in the guard-room, and 't will please the fat sinner better, aye, than a sanctus, though chanted by a score of cardinals. He is safe — I need no better assurance than his gluttony. Would the Ommadawn play me false? I think not. He has served me faithfully twelve long years — yet the escape of young Macmahon was

* Ommadawn, in Irish, means a fool.

never cleared — look to thyself, Worouski! were thy service doubled, and thy folly tenfold, one act of treachery, and thou shalt dangle where thy betters did!"

She ceased, and, after a short silence, turned and addressed her young companion. "Come hither, Inéz — lay thy gew-gaw trumpery aside — listen and answer honestly."

There was a stern and impressive character in the lady's features, as she looked at the changing colour of her grandchild, which awed the gentle girl.

"Inez, thou wilt be nineteen, come Martinmas; and, before thy age, I had many a suitor, and was a betrothed bride; — wouldst thou not wish to wed?" The sudden interrogatory, and the searching glance which accompanied it, increased the confusion of the person who had been so abruptly questioned. This did not pass the lady's observation, but, without remark, she thus continued,

"Inez, thou art mine only relation — the last scion of a princely stock — the sole descendant — object of all the care, and heiress of all the possessions of Grace O'Malley. Time has been busy with this frame of mine; — those locks, once black as the raven's pinion, are sprinkling fast with silver. My step is slower, my heart beats feebly to what it once did — all these things foretell that the winter of my days approaches. Mine has been no sluggard life; — five castles call me mistress, and five hundred followers bend at my command. *The flying horse** sweeps the sea unopposed from the Loop Head to Broad Haven; it quails to neither prince nor baron; nay, not to the royal standard of the English queen. Many wish to call me friend, and few to count me foe. I have sheltered the fugitive with a thousand marks upon his head, when the boldest noble of the pale dared not to harbour him for an hour. Injury I have repaid with injury; and vengeance never slept with me until she was amply glutted. Let the Saxon horseman and the Sasenach lord deride the *she wolf*,† while they ride with mailed followers, and sleep behind their castle walls: but when they trust the sea, let their galleys but leave their harbour, and, if they borrow not the eagle's wings, by our Lady's grace, they will dearly rue the day they dared to tempt my enmity!" Her eyes flashed lightning as she spoke, and, spurning the footstool with a violence which startled the listening girl, she traversed the chamber with the stride and bearing of a warrior. "Inez, I may leave thee lands and galleys, but how long will they call thee mistress? I can gift thee bravely with castles, but couldst thou hold them, girl? How long would my Kinahons‡ ride at thy bidding? and how long my hardy mariners sail at thy command? While *I* live, thou art secure. While *I* can hold this key, (she raised one from her girdle,) none will approach my gate in hostile guise; or, if they do, while I can grasp the *middoge*§ they shall not return with impunity. But thy safety must be ensured, and I must provide thee with a brave protector."

Inez started; her colour rose as the Dark Lady continued. "Yes, thou shalt have a stirring chief — his strength shall protect thy weakness, and his fame be worthy to succeed that of the Bantheirna Neillawn.‖ I have chosen a bold husband for thee — thou shalt wed O'Connor au lauve dhanag!"¶

Inez had listened, in breathless alarm, as her stern grandame proceeded; but, when he of the red hand was named, her face grew as pale as ashes, and she exclaimed, in an agony of terror —

"Wed O'Connor dhanag? — he, the homicide, the rob ——"

* The crest of the O'Malleys.
† One of her numerous soubriquets.
‡ Military retainers.
§ The ancient Irish dagger.
‖ Lady of the Islands.
¶ O'Connor of the Red Hand.

"Why, in the devil's name! what frights the silly wench? Robber wouldst thou call him, weak girl? — robber let it be, if it so please ye. *I too* am a robber — look round thee — whence came this garniture? Ask the Spanish shipman, and he will tell thee, he was plundered by the Dark Woman of the Isles! Whence comes the wine, which flows as freely in Doona as poor ale in the castle of an inland baron? The mariner from Bordeaux mayhap might solve that mystery. I war when and with whom I please. These seas are mine — *mine* by right of inheritance. I am their mistress — I laugh at modern laws. The Tudor and Plantagenet make none to trammel Grace O'Malley. While galley swims, and horseman rides at her bidding, the kine shall low in her court-yard, and the wine-cup sparkle on her board. To thy couch, Inez! thou knowest now thy destiny — I have willed it so — be that enough for thee. To thy chamber, Inez! tell thy rosary twice over, and bless the Virgin for giving thee a grandame able and determined to leave thee powerful. Worouski bears my overtures to Au dhanag laurve."

"O God! that he may reject them!" ejaculated the trembling girl.

"Reject them! No, wench — *he will not, dare not*, refuse to wed the heiress of the Ban Oussel Dhu!* No, no — O'Connor is no idiot. But, hark! who comes so late? That note was never blown by the Omma-dawn." — And the horn at the castle gate was winded a second time. — "To thy chamber, Inez. I must know who the strangers be, before, at this late hour, a bar or bolt be drawn." She said, and quitted the apartment hastily.

"She is gone," said the fair girl, "but not till she had completed my misery. *I wed the Red Hand* — never! The grave shall be more welcome than the marriage-couch of a murderer! Heaven pity me! for nothing else can avert my fate, or bend that ruthless woman from her purpose."

Bursting into tears, she quitted the chamber of state for the smaller closet, which had been allotted to her use by her stern relative.

CHAPTER II.

The day had been unusually calm — not a breath of wind was stirring — the dark blue surface of the Atlantic was unruffled, as far as the eye could range — and the impatient seaman, as he leaned over the bulwark of the bark, looked at the sky and the deep, seeking in vain for some symptom of a coming breeze. The vessel rolled lazily on the long swell of the ocean, and the frequent and monotonous rustle of the empty canvass showed that the bark was only drifting with the tide.

Close in with the land, a galliot was becalmed under the huge cliffs of Saddle Head; part of the crew were sleeping, and part collected forward in a group, endeavouring to while away this inactive portion of their duty by listening to the common-place narratives of nautical adventure. Beside the helm, which had been abandoned, as the bark for hours had wanted steerage-way, two youths stood conversing, whose different dress and superior air proved them to be no seafaring men, but personages of honour and distinction.

"How provoking, Gerald, to be within a stone's cast of land, and remain cooped within the galliasse, floating as idly as yonder heap of sea-weed."

"And yet, Ralph, wherefore should we be anxious to leave the bark? We have no waiting friends to bid us welcome — no broad lands to call us masters. We are felons and traitors, if the queen's excellent majesty and

* The Dark Lady.

her most upright counsellors can be relied upon. I am attainted, and thou proscribed—I have been deprived of rights and titles, and thou hast an hundred marks upon thy head. But, courage, Montravers; let fate stand our friend; we may mend, and, by St. Jude! we cannot mar, our fortunes."

"Aye, Gerald, we are fairly matched; thou an outcast from thy boyhood, and I a wandering, broken man, who has seen his fortunes wrecked beyond recovery, and the best and bravest master perish on the scaffold, the victim of that heartless hag, Elizabeth."

"Hush, hush! speak treason only, Ralph—Thou mayest then, haply, escape the axe; but, by the mass! breathe but one doubt upon the peerless beauty of the virgin monarch, and thy fate is sealed. But, softly; I see our schipper has come on deck: he is a shrewd knave, and we had better keep our histories to ourselves."

"He has done us good service, however, and acquitted himself right faithfully. I may wrong him, by doubting that his calling is an honest one; yet, if he be a rogue, 'fore God! he is a bold one. His light shallop was never fitted out for commerce; his crew are wild and numerous, and look more like rovers of the sea, than men engaged in the sober cause of traffic. Our guide may be somewhat uncultured in his manners, but in air and bearing he is far beyond his mates. Trust me, Gerald, we are in but indifferent company."

"Well, well, let the wind blow a few hours, and it shall part us. See, here comes Hubert—if, in sooth, that be his true name. As he spoke, the schipper of the galliasse approached the place where his passengers were discoursing. He was a very young man; but the hardships of a sea life had left their rough traces on his bronzed countenance, and proved that he had been buffeting their fury from his boyhood. His person was of the middle size, and admirably proportioned for endurance of fatigue, and the lighter feats of manly exercise. His sun-burnt countenance was open and intelligent; courage and ready wit might be traced in the expression of his handsome features and the flashing of his keen black eye;—and he gave his orders with that decision, which bespoke a perfect confidence in his own skill, and the certainty of meeting an implicit obedience from his comrades. His dress was made of coarse blue kersey, though not in the usual form of that worn by seamen. It was a loose and shapeless upper coat peculiar to the mariners of Flushing, with a sort of garment attached, formed like a woman's petticoat, which only descended to the knee. He wore a seal-skin cap upon his head, and had a telescope in his hand, which he occasionally directed towards the west.

"The breeze," he said, addressing his passengers, "is gathering, and in a few minutes we shall have a flowing sheet and a swelling sail. You are wearied, doubtless, noble sirs, with lying on the water like a log; but the wind will have its way, and the tide will never stay—at least, so goes the adage."

"We must be patient, Hubert," said the taller youth;—"and now to pay our passage. Come hither—thou hast earned thy guerdon honestly;" and he told twelve broad pieces into the mariner's hand.—"We shall soon bid you farewell, wishing your returning voyage prosperous." The schipper still held the gold carelessly, nor offered to place it in his pocket. The second youth observed it, and exclaimed—"How now, knave!—Wouldst thou tell it over? do so—a murrain take thee—think ye we would deprive thee of a groat?—tell it man—the count is there."

"This pays me not," said the mariner coldly.

"Why, what the foul fiend ails thee?—Is it not thy bargain, fellow?"

"*It is not;*" for half the sum was all I claimed when I took you on board the Jolly Tar. Gold will not pay me, Sir Knights;—grant me a

boon, if it please you; but for gold, I neither want nor take it; and I suspect that my own girdle holds more pieces of coin than both your purses, were their united contents told twice over."

"By Saint Paul! thou art a saucy varlet," said the tall stranger, with a smile; "you give us gallant titles, which we deserve not, and in the same breath tax us roundly with our poverty. — What boon dost thou purpose? — speak, the breeze is rising, and my foot longs to press the green sward once more."

"The boon is simple," said the mariner, as he laid his hand upon the helm to direct the vessel's course. — "I would serve you as your gentleman."

The tall youth smiled, and his companion laughed outright. — "Hubert," said the former, "little dost thou know how broken are the fortunes of him you would accompany; — I could not pay thy service; for, by the rood! where I shall bestow me when I shall leave thy bark, I know not."

"And yet," said the steersman carelessly, "the Earls of Kildare could once have rewarded good service bravely."

The youth started. "By heaven! Ralph, he has my secret;" — then turning to the schipper, he demanded haughtily, "Fellow, what knowest thou of me?"

"Every thing," was the cool reply, — "from the hour you left the protection of Lady Mary of Offaly, till you were confided to that of the Duke, at Mantua; aye, Earl, every adventure, from the time you tumbled into the pit hunting with the gallant cardinal, until you fell in love dancing at the queen's mask, with the fairest star of all, the peerless Mabel Montague."

"Gerald! thy confessor knows not more than this strange fellow; I ever swore thou couldst not keep thyself incognito. Now will I defy the knave, an he be any one less than Sathanas, to say who I am, and what errand brought me hither."

"Under favour, no knave, Sir Knight; and yet one who might haply blunder on some incidents of thy own numerous exploits."

"No, by the rood, or I'll give thee leave to call me as poor a masquer as my friend."

"Knowest thou aught of Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex? — Speak, why wince ye, knight? the question is but a simple one. Never did a braver noble stoop to the headsman's axe. He had deadly enemies and devoted friends; *one* was this gallant master of the horse. When the bright fortunes of that splendid favourite were darkened by his own folly, and the unceasing malice of his foes, who clung more faithfully to his beloved lord, or fought more desperately on the earl's last mad attempt, than *Ralph Montravers?*"

"Thou art discovered, Ralph; and yet, in faith, it is a poor jest, to feel that we are in the power of a stranger. Thou wouldst not play us false?" and he darted a searching glance at the mariner.

"I would not," returned the schipper calmly, "were thy attainder, noble Earl, attended with more perilous consequences to him who harboured you, or the marks upon your head, Sir Knight, trebled."

"But what security can be placed in mere assertion?"

"If I would betray you," said the mariner, "the port of Galway was as easily made as this wild bay; and Sir John Mowbray would oblige his royal mistress, by sending you in safe keeping to England. Elizabeth has a garrison in Sligo; could not the bark have been steered a little to the northward? Look over yon beetling point;" — for the vessel had now rounded the headland, and was opening the bay of Doohooma. "Seest thou aught in the red streak of light, which the setting sun has left behind him?"

"There is a dark building rising above a grove of fir-trees."

"Your sight is accurate, Sir Knight; and *there* lives one, who would win the reward, and fetter you as closely as ever prisoner was manacled. The *Ban Durragha*,* as I have heard men say, of late years has become marvellously loyal."

"The Ban Durragha — who may he be?"

The schipper smiled. — "*She*, rather, if it so please ye; Grace O'Malley, called Lady by her followers, and fifty names besides by the rest of mankind, lives in yon black building; that is the castle of Doona. But mark! the watch-tower spies us."

Favoured by wind and tide, the bark ran quickly between Achill Head and Devilawn, but it did not escape the vigilant look-out kept on the hill of Tarmon. A flame arose from the tower, which in a few minutes was answered by another from the castle of Doona. Regardless of either signal, the bark stood on till she passed the Ridge Point; when, rounding to, she lowered her sails.

"Thus ends our voyage," said the schipper, as the splash of the falling anchor was heard. "And now, what say you—shall I take on service with you, noble sirs?"

"What couldst thou do;" said the tall youth, with a smile, "I ween thou hast never been regularly bred up a gentleman of the bed-chamber."

"Indeed, the tale of my accomplishments is soon told; but, noble Earl, what I lack in experience might I not balance in fidelity?"

"Canst ride? canst fence?" said the second stranger.

"He would be a wild steed that could make me part the saddle. I can wield a brand indifferently, shoot a fair shot with bolt or bullet, steer the Jolly Tar from Clare to the Canaries, learn the counsel of other men, and manage to conceal my own."

"Gerald, he has us there — what wouldst thou have for good service?"

"Just what good service merited — shall I take on, Lord Earl?"

"If thou wilt try fortunes with one so broken as myself, thou art welcome?"

The schipper bowed. "Pardon a short absence," he said, and calling apart one, who seemed his second in command, he conversed with him earnestly for a few minutes, and then vanished down the hatchway.

"We have gained a shrewd attendant, Ralph — 'T is a strange and amphibious sort of animal, but yet may be useful in our exigency — I perceive we are to land immediately. The shipmen are bringing our mails and weapons from below, while others are launching the pinnace off the deck."

"Well, fate direct us! — for where to steer our course, I know not."

A short time had elapsed, when Hubert rejoined his new masters. His sea attire was exchanged for a neat and well-appointed jerkin and trunks. His appearance was now that of a well-conditioned yeoman, and a small hunting hanger and feathered cap well became the bravery of an earl's yeoman.

"Come, noble sirs, night draws on apace, and after curfew we might find an entrance into Doona no easy affair. The *Ban Oussel* then rarely opens her gates to strangers. — We lodge there to-night, unless your worship have otherwise provided."

"In faith, Hubert, if the lodging be not furnished by thyself, we are most likely to have a green couch and a starry canopy."

"Tush! We must not take to the greenwood till stone walls fail us. But, gallant gentlemen" — and his voice sunk to a whisper — "what names do you purpose borrowing? With your own titles, I promise you a ready

* The Dark Woman.

entrance; but, an you wish to return, 'fore God, you must seek a better surety than mine."

"Gerald, the knave speaks truly; shall we be kinsmen, drop our own titles, and take our old companion Tyrrell's?"

"'T will answer."

"But your story — your business? The Ban Durragha, credit me, takes a lively interest in the affairs of her visiters, and, particularly, such as arrive at midnight, and who can give but an indifferent account of knightly looks and empty purses. But the boat waits, and we can frame a fitting tale for the Peragh* as we row to shore."

As the little pinnace pulled from the galliot, Montravers asked if the bark would remain long where she had anchored.

"Only till the boat returns. No, no — The Lady Grace makes sad mistakes in trifling matters of right and property. Her enemies, men say, are numerous, she wages, therefore, a sort of indiscriminate warfare, and is by no means scrupulous as to grounds of quarrel. By accident, she might include us in the list, and under that impression, annex the Jolly Tar to her own squadron. But to guard against mistakes, ere morning break, the bark will be far beyond the danger. As he spoke, the pinnace grounded on a sandy beach, and the passengers and their light baggage were promptly landed. The boat then pulled out to sea, and the strangers and their esquire were left together.

A thick wood skirted the shore, and its dense and tangled copse seemed, in the pale moonlight, to present an impervious obstacle to the travellers. Hubert, however, having placed the luggage on his shoulders, guided his companions by a difficult and winding pathway. He appeared perfectly acquainted with the localities of the forest; for, at a round pace, he led them directly to their destination. As they walked on, a ready story was invented to excuse their untimely visit to the castle, and before they reached the gate, Hubert declared himself well prepared to meet the interrogatories, to which, undoubtedly, her belated visiters would be subjected, before being admitted by the Dark Lady of Doona. The loud baying of a large wolf dog, the flaring of numerous lights, and the shadows of human figures indistinctly seen as they passed the arrow slits above the portal, showed that the inmates of the castle were on the alert, and that the approach of strangers had been discovered. But before the warder could demand their names, and report their coming, Hubert seized the huge moorse horn which was suspended at the gate, and his loud and repeated blasts apprized the Ban Oussel Dhu, that unexpected guests were waiting for admission.

CHAPTER III.

Some time elapsed, and the summons of the belated travellers was unanswered. "A murrain light upon the lazy porter," said Hubert, peevishly; the knave's nook is no doubt a warm one, and he recks little how long he leaves us shivering in the cold night air. Mayhap he has stuck too closely to the flagon; but I'll see whether another blast may not rouse the sluggard." So saying, he advanced to the gate, and seized the horn anew.

"Leave it alone, young man," said a hoarse voice from a loop-hole at his side; "be advised by me, and keep thy breath to tell thy errand. People before now have blown as sturdy blast as thine own, who would have afterwards given a rose noble that they had never laid lip to horn."

While the voice was still speaking, a small lattice in the gate, strongly

* *The Pirate*, another of the lady's appellations.

fenced with iron stancheons, was cautiously unclosed, and the muzzles of several musquetoons and hand-guns protruded through the shot-holes, which were above and around the portal —

"Who are ye? and what brings you here?' was demanded, by a bold and peculiar voice, from the open wicket.

"We are strangers, and are seeking lodging for the night."

"Strangers ye may be; but who and what ye are I shall know before ye enter here. Your names?"

"Tyrrell; we are brothers, and this is our attendant."

"Tyrrell — the name is English. What are ye?"

"Gentlemen by descent, and soldiers by profession."

"Gentlemen and soldiers. What drove ye hither at midnight?"

"We are bound to Galway, where our regiment lies under the command of Sir John Mowbray. Contrary winds, and the ignorance of the pilot, made us lose our true course, and wander to the northward. Provisions failed us, and our water grew scant; and, at our own risk, we were landed here at sunset."

"Have ye no other company?"

"None, save our gentleman."

"Admit them, Comac, and then conduct them to our presence."

The last order proved, that the speaker was no other than the Dark Lady. The falling of heavy chains, and the removal of bars and fastenings succeeded. Presently the gate unclosed, and, amidst a glare of torch-light, and through a confused crowd of wild and savage-looking men armed with pikes and hand-guns, the strangers were ushered into an inner court-yard. Beneath the arched door-way of the principal tower or keep, an elderly man was standing, holding a lighted taper in his hand. He was attired in a kind of livery, having the *salient horse* rudely emblazoned on his surcoat. He roughly bade the travellers welcome; and, desiring them to follow, led the way up a steep winding stair, and pointing to a door, told them, that the Lady Grace was there waiting to receive them.

The Ban Oussel was seated in her high black chair, with her foot resting on a hassock; a very handsome female was standing at her back, and a dumb boy, richly but gaudily attired, was placed beside a tripod table, on which silver cups and flagons of chased and curious workmanship were laid out. From the form and devices of these vessels, it was quite evident that they once had been the property of the church, and originally designed for very different purposes from those to which they had been latterly applied. Additional tapers had been introduced into the chamber of state, and they were so disposed as to throw their light upon the door-way, and thus enable the Dark Lady to scrutinize the persons and features of her midnight visiters, as they were conducted to her presence.

It would appear that this momentary inspection of the guests had terminated in their favour. She waved her hand with dignity, and motioned them to be seated. The pseudo-brothers obeyed; and Hubert remained standing. On a signal, the dumb boy filled a large cup with the wine of Burgundy. This he first presented to the Ban Oussel, who courteously pledged the strangers; and then, delivering it to the guests, they drank to their hostess in return.

"We were retiring to rest," said the Dark Lady, "and deemed not that visiters would honour us thus late. Refreshments will soon be ready; meanwhile, drink, gentlemen:" and she signalled the page to fill the cup anew. "That wine should be indifferent good — it has been some winters in our cellar; — try it, you shall have a stoop of Bordeaux presently. While the meal is coming, if you were not too much wearied with your voyage, I would inquire what was the latest news of England. Has aught occurred of import there since Robert Devereux lost his head? and has Elizabeth

replaced her lover? Does she now read homilies or sing madrigals? and is she oftener at the masque or the altar? By our lady! she is a miracle of endurance. I count not within ten years of hers, and time treats me saucily. Essex was a brave soldier and a sorry statesman — I entertained him at my poor castle of Carrickahowla, when he came hither to visit the Lord Deputy of Connaught. I thought him a noble and courteous gentleman, but, by Saint Bride! I suspected that his head was something of the lightest; and, God rest him! as it fell out, he proved he could not keep it on his shoulders. Go, Una, tell the loitering knaves to serve our meal directly. Had I been forewarned of your coming, I would have given you a better welcome. Soldiers and shipmen betimes must fare but slenderly."

After a short delay, the person in the emblazoned surcoat entered, bearing supper, in which he was assisted by several attendants. He made numerous excuses to his lady for the poverty of the meal. — "The cooks and scullions were a-bed, and he feared detaining her guests while a better entertainment could be provided. Yet now-a-days, the supper served would be accounted sufficiently substantial. It consisted of an ample supply of venison steaks, broiled sea trouts, and grouse brandered on the coals. Besides these, there were as many cold joints of fresh and preserved meats as would have satisfied a troop of hungry travellers. In the conduct of the meal there was much of rude display — silver plate appeared there in strange and anomalous variety, as many articles exhibited on the board were rather placed there for show than for utility. Flasks of rare and exquisite wines were lavishly opened; and the Ban Oussel did the honours of the table, with a haughty grace, mixed with much sincere hospitality. After the meal was ended, and the cup had passed frequently, and been as often replenished, the lady rose to retire, having first intimated to her guests that their sleeping chamber was on the floor beneath. She left the room, preceded by the liveried groom with a taper, and followed by her handsome gentlewoman.

The dumb boy remained to wait upon the strangers; and presently, the personage who had lighted the Ban Oussel from the chamber returned, bearing from his lady "a fair good-night," with a request that her guests would not spare the wine-flasks, of which this functionary, who appeared a sort of head server, had brought a fresh supply.

"Let that poor lad retire," said Fitzgerald to his companion, as he pointed to the dumb boy. — "With Hubert's aid, we shall manage to reach our hamber, even with another cup aboard."

Montravers turned to the page, who was anxiously watching for orders, nd, pointing to the door, signed to him that he might withdraw. The youth owed; but as he passed the place where Hubert was seated, the latter suddenly rose from his seat, laid his hand upon the boy's shoulder, and gazing for a moment with intense interest on his features, sank down again, labouring under a violent and unaccountable emotion, while the page, apparently alarmed at this earnest scrutiny, hurried from the chamber.

"Gerald, what think you of the night's adventure? Matters looked anything but promising when thou and I were catechised at the gate, with a score of rascally musquetoons levelled at us from within. I' faith, it is no jest to undergo an examination, with the certainty that a trip of the tongue will be requited by a brace of bullets; but, once in, the quarters are unobjectionable. What, ho! — Hubert — art asleep, or dead? — a plague upon thee for a dreamer — out with another cork. The flavour of this Bourdeaux is exquisite — by Saint Peter! a cardinal might get glorious over-night, and his conscience be little the worse for it on the morrow."

"Stop, Ralph," cried his companion, "Hubert looks deadly pale;" and both the young men started from their seats, and approached their attendant,

who had risen unperceived from the bottom of the table, and was leaning against the casement.

"'T is but a passing weakness, noble sirs," he said faintly. — "Thanks for this kindness," as he took the goblet which Montravers offered him. "I have had some smack of ague since I sojourned in the Low Country — 't will go off presently;" and he passed his hand across his forehead, where the cold drops were trembling on his brows. With an effort he raised the cup to his lips, and having drunk, his sudden indisposition gradually subsided, and, according to the fashion of the times, he returned to the bottom of the table, and joined his nobler associates.

"Take thy cup, Hubert — the colour again mantles in thy cheek. Trust me, the red grape is the best restorative. 'Fore God, Gerald, the wine is marvellous. Why, the Ban Oussel, or whatever name you give her, is a most praiseworthy personage — her cellarage is unequalled. The chancellor — aye, or the lord deputy himself, — could not produce a better flask than this."

"It cost but little," said the attendant, in a whisper.

"What mean you, Hubert?"

"It was probably," said the squire, "once the property of some one of the lady's numerous and indefinite enemies. They invaded the wide seas, which she most reasonably claims as her inheritance and exclusive property; her galleys sailed faster, and the strangers were plundered accordingly."

"Nay, by St. Paul! we may inquire about the means hereafter; but, at the present, we shall not quarrel with the liquor for not exactly knowing by what means it came into this honest lady's custody. But the night wears, and now for our chamber. Hubert, if you provide us thus, thy service will be above guerdon. I could now be so happy, but, ah, the seas divide us. Mabel! Mabel! would that we had never met, or never parted!"

"Aye, Gerald, there lies the drawback. Now, for Maud or Mabel, I care not a gray groat. Thanks to my lucky stars, if all else were shipwrecked, I brought here a careless heart. Confound the Bourdeaux! me thinks a fresh set of tapers have been lighted in the apartments. Ah! wine, like love, will have its way. Come, Hubert; take a light, man — to bed — it is full time. Our room is above us — at least, the old dame said so, an I err not."

"*Beneath*, Sir Knight."

"It makes no difference, I presume. Come along, Gerald. By the mass! I have a strange whizzing of the brain, and a most miraculous unsteadiness of limb. The Ban's wine is unrivalled."

Montravers's companion thought it full time to retire. Hubert proceeded, then, with tapers, to guide them to their sleeping-room. But there was no likelihood that they would have been suffered to mistake their chamber: an armed sentinel was stationed at the door, and, as Fitzgerald accidentally raised his eyes to the upper landing-place, they were encountered by those of the Dark Lady, who was looking over the free-stone balustrade above.

Within their dormitory, things were better regulated, and much more comfortable, than the rude character of the mansion would have led them to expect. Their cribs were comfortably laid out, and provided with an ample quantity of coverings. Montravers required no other sleeping draught than the Bourdeaux he had so liberally indulged in; Fitzgerald, in a few minutes, was dreaming of his absent Mabel; and Hubert slept, or pretended to sleep.

CHAPTER IV.

Wild and perilous as the period was when the Lady of Doona flourished, and when women swayed the sceptres of England and Scotland, her strange history was more romantic than any upon the records of that age.

She was the only child of the chieftain of the O'Malleys, and her earlier years were passed in the castle of Clare Island. Her mother died while she was yet an infant; and her father, entirely engrossed with the eternal feuds of those unsettled times, rarely had leisure to visit the insulated abode of the deserted orphan. "Lord of a barren heritage," his sword was his best possession: a powerful and devoted band of martial followers were ever ready to execute the orders of their daring leader; and the life of Cormac More* was a wild career of predatory adventure, marked only by the vicissitudes of lawless times, crowned one while with success, or driven for shelter to his island fastness, according to the varying alternations of victory and defeat.

The earlier years of the Lady Grace passed, before she claimed any attention from her fierce and warlike father; for his unfrequent visits to his island home were consumed in rude revelry and military preparation. But time stole on: the twelfth summer of his daughter's life was over, when Cormac Dhu,† surprised in a defile by a superior enemy, was defeated with considerable loss; and by great exertion, and a heavy sacrifice of life, was borne with difficulty from the fatal field, severely wounded, by the remnant of his gallant band. Transported on a rude litter, he was carried, under cover of the night, through the mountain passes, and at last found shelter from his pursuers, within the walls of his paternal town.

Then it was that the wounded chief, during the long and painful months that were required to effect his cure, learned first to know and love his deserted child. Young as she was, her commanding bearing struck her parent with delight, while her bold and free carriage, mingled with undoubted proofs of tenderness for his sufferings, made a deep and lasting impression on the wild and lawless chief. No feminine timidity checked her in word or action — to fear, or woman's nervousness, she seemed a stranger; and when the stoutest of the retainers at times hesitated to communicate to Cormac Dhu some evil tidings from the mainland, the undaunted girl would convey the unwelcome news, and, reckless of the unrestrained fury the disclosure might produce, would calmly await the orders of the fiery chieftain, till passion had subsided, and reason again resumed her influence. No wonder, then, that Cormac Dhu, during his long confinement, had opportunities, which otherwise he would have lacked, to know and love his child; and when his recovery was at last effected, that a new object engrossed his thoughts, and all his future schemes were directed to one end — to increase the possessions of his daughter, and obtain a noble alliance for the heiress of the lands and castle of Clare Island.

A stormy period of feudal warfare succeeded. Age, meanwhile, was stealing imperceptibly upon the dark chieftain, and, almost worn down by a long career of perilous adventure, Cormac Dhu began to require more repose than the fierce and unsettled spirit of the times would safely permit. Grace had attained her seventeenth year — the girl was ripening fast to womanhood, and she was alike remarkable for her beauty and a bold and masculine disposition. Already the lovely heiress had excited the attention

* Cormac More—Large or Great Cormac. † Cormac Dhu—Black Cormac.

of the neighbouring chiefs, and, under various pretexts, many a visiter repaired to the castle of Clare Island, attracted by the flattering reports which reached the main land, touching the beauty of Cormac Dhu's daughter. Several suitors had declared themselves — several had made preliminary overtures through monks and minstrels, then the accredited agents in every embassy of love; when it was formally announced that Macmahon, now Lord of Enis, and one of the most powerful of the western chiefs, intended to honour Clare Island with a visit, and, if report spake true, demand from her father the Lady Grace in marriage.

The intelligence that the great Macmahon was about to become a suitor for his daughter's hand, was highly gratifying to Cormac Dhu. Extensively allied by blood and intermarriages with the most powerful of the north-western families, the lords of Enis had been among the most successful adventurers of the day. The paternal property of the Macmahons joined the hereditary possessions of his intended bride; and Cormac, by an alliance with this influential chief, would not only aggrandize his child, but secure the friendship and co-operation of a rival clan, who, for years, had been as formidable for numbers, as, from the contiguity of their strong-hold to his island castle, a source of considerable inquietude. Macmahon had but newly succeeded to his estates. He was characterized as a rude but daring soldier, but little was known about him now; for, living on very indifferent terms with his deceased father, he had chiefly engaged himself in the wars of the pale, and seldom repaired to his paternal home, where report said he had been but coldly received during his short and infrequent visits.

It was the close of September, and the arrival of the Lady Grace's suitor was daily expected. Rude preparations were busily made to receive the guest with honourable welcome. The friends and kindred of the O'Malleys were assembled, and galley after galley arrived from Innisboffen and Innustuth, with the remoter clansmen who left the islands to pay their duty to their chief. The tidings of the intended festivity spread over the adjacent counties, and harpers and pipers flocked from distant parts, to share the revelry and profit by the festival. A small galliasse had already been despatched to announce the departure of Macmahon from his castle of Doona, when the weather, which had been unusually calm, began to change suddenly; clouds collected in the south-west, a thick haze rose over the distant ocean — the breeze freshened momently, and, in an hour, every indication of an equinoctial gale was manifest, and the united exertions of the islanders were directed to launch the galleys up the beach, and secure them from the approaching tempest.

Numerous as the inmates of the castle were, their combined efforts could scarcely succeed in placing the little fleet in safety. The sea rose in mountain-ridges, and came roaring into the harbour, while the rudely-constructed pier could scarcely protect the galleys from the mountain-waves, that burst in thunder on the beach. The spray, in showers, struck the upper casements of the tower, where the heiress of Clare Island was seated with her attendants; and while her more timid followers were terrified at the fury of the gale, their bolder mistress gazed upon the troubled elements with a stern satisfaction, that seemed to say that the commotion of sea and sky were but congenial to her own wild and fearless spirit.

"Una," she said, addressing a young and handsome girl, who appeared to be her favourite attendant, "Look out upon the ocean. Did ever storm come on so fiercely? This island lover will hardly tempt the sea to claim his mistress. Would he were off the harbour but a league, and the gale might prove his manhood and his seamanship together. I know not how it is, but I am half prepared to hate him. They tell me he is proud and daring. Well, we 'll put him to the test ere he weds with Grace O'Malley; and if he

thinks she is to be won like other women, by dying looks and posied words, Saint Mary! but he reckons wrong. But, see! Holy Mother! what is yonder speck upon the foam of ocean, now hid, now visible? 'T is gone; — look southward, girl. I saw it again! It is a bark," and springing past ner maidens, the Lady Grace rushed up the narrow staircase which led to the summit of the tower. Nor was she deceived. The watchman was already directing his telescope through an arrow-slit which commanded the southern ocean, and, though distinctly visible at times, at others hidden by the swell of the Atlantic — a galley, under bare poles, and without venturing to show an inch of canvass, was seen furiously driven by sea and storm, upon those black and foam-covered cliffs, which everywhere surround Clare Island.

The tower of the castle was speedily crowded with the chieftain and his followers. Every moment, the unhappy vessel approached nearer, and at length it was clearly ascertained that she was a galley of large size and foreign build. Her destruction was inevitable — no assistance could be rendered from the shore, and, as she hurried furiously towards the Bridge Point, where the cliffs, in masses of three hundred feet, overhung the ocean, and even in a calm were with difficulty approached, the fate of the mariners was but too certain. Actuated by mingled motives of plunder or curiosity, the inmates of the castle hastened to the spot; and while her garments could scarcely withstand the storm that raged around, the daughter of Cormac had mingled with her father's followers, and from the precipices which beetled over the tempest-troubled ocean, now watched with intense anxiety the devoted bark as it was urged irresistibly to destruction.

The vessel, now occasionally seen through spray and billows, was a stout and well-appointed bark; but it was in vain for the despairing crew to make an effort to arrest the fate that seemed inevitable — one attempt was tried, to hoist a close-reefed fore-sail, but the canvass was blown from the yard before it could be well expanded. On drove the galley — and the crew, consisting of a score of men, were seen collected on the quarter-deck, waiting in despairing silence until the hapless vessel should strike, and the moment of dissolution arrive.

Nor were they long kept in suspense. Nearing the fatal ridge where the surf was breaking violently, the galley touched lightly on the outer point; — another minute, and a sea carried and left her upon the very summit of the reef; — the masts went over the side, and the boat, which had been prepared for the attempt, hung for a second with its crowded crew upon the broken surface. Next moment it rose upon the surf, keel uppermost, and every being who had intrusted their lives to that frail chance, was plunged into the breakers and perished.

Still the disabled vessel hung upon the reef, while each succeeding wave was expected to complete its destruction. But the water ebbed rapidly, and the shattered wreck still remained unbroken; all the brave equipments of the galley had already drifted to the land, and before the tide had half fallen, the dead bodies of the crew were left upon the sands, which now were crowded with the islanders.

Another hour passed — the wreck was deemed approachable from the shore, and the most active of the chief's followers boarded the ill-fated vessel. Their absence was but short, for night, and the flowing tides, and unabated gales, obliged them to return, and when they landed on the beach, the astonishment of Cormac and his daughter was extreme, when among the varied articles of rich plunder which they had brought away, a young and noble-looking stranger was lifted from the boat, and left upon the beach, beside his dead companions.

Wild and masculine as the heiress of Clare Island was, she could not look upon the situation of that desolate man without emotion. While her

sire and his clansmen were engaged in saving the merchandise brought from the vessel, and hauling up the boats beyond the expected influence of the coming tide, young Grace knelt over the forsaken stranger, and examined his appearance attentively. He was evidently no common man; his were not the coarse vestments and rugged features of a low-born mariner; his dress, though drenched with spray, and spoiled by storm, had once been costly; a rapier was suspended at his belt; a jewelled ring still clasped his finger, and his pale features and coal-black moustache, even though life had almost parted, bespoke the knightly dignity of the hapless foreigner. He was conveyed with tenderness, by the lady's order, to the castle, and placed under the management of a monk, whose skill in medicine was celebrated. The stranger was kindly and carefully attended, and in four days he had sufficiently recovered from his bruises to venture, with the monk's assistance, to leave his chamber.

Nor did the lady's attention to her unknown guest cease with medicinal relief. The stranger's mails were driven on the beach, when the vessel next day parted, and his wardrobe was collected, and faithfully restored. A week passed; the monk carried his patient to the extremity of the island, that, while engaged in his official duties, his patient should not, in the interval, be neglected. The unknown became rapidly convalescent; and when the churchman was summoned by his patron to meet Macmahon More, whose arrival was at last announced, the shipwrecked stranger bore but little resemblance to that pale and death-stricken sufferer, whom the Lady Grace had so lately seen and succoured.

When the monk and his companion reached the castle, evening was already closing, and extensive preparations were making to feast the long-expected visiter. The stranger, to do honour to his kind protectress, arrayed himself in his gayest braveries; and while an attendant was despatched to introduce him to the hall, the heiress of Clare Castle waited impatiently to converse with the young foreigner, who, even in apparent dissolution, had not been seen without an interest she had never felt before.

Nor was the lady kept long in expectation. The sewer returned, accompanied by the gallant stranger, and in a moment the blood rushed to her haughty brow, as Cormac's daughter gazed on the handsome youth. His rich dress, gayly embroidered and slashed with velvet, fitted closely to his light but well-proportioned limbs; his face was singularly intelligent, while his dark eye and small moustache gave it a bold and martial character. His step was free and soldierly. His bearing bespoke noble lineage and gentle nurture, and the broad chain around his neck, and golden spurs upon his buskins, told that, though his years were few, he had yet been deemed a worthy candidate for knighthood. A plumed cap was in his hand; and when he had advanced three paces within the hall, he stopped before Cormac Dhu, to wait his reception from the island lord.

"Stranger, may I ask thy name? was the first question addressed by Cormac to his guest. The youth bowed. "My name," he replied, "is Hubert de Lacy, a poor kinsman of the constable of Chester."

"We have heard of thy kinsman frequently. He commanded the English of the Pale, and was once the favourite of Henry. Is he still in the queen's service, or, like others, has he been disgraced and recalled?"

"No one can disgrace him now," said the stranger mournfully. "He sleeps where none shall mar his slumbering."

"He is dead then. Peace to the ashes of a gallant soldier!"—and Cormac, the priest, and all within hearing, crossed themselves devoutly as they muttered a prayer for the departed. "Died he upon the field?"

The young soldier paused.—"He died upon Tower-hill; and that proud spirit which blazed through a hundred battles, was sped by the headsman's steel."

"You escaped?"

"With scarcely aught but life. Two faithful grooms, who would not desert the fortunes of the De Lacys, shared my flight; and, alas! as you know, they escaped the axe only to die in the ocean. They were swept from the wreck before my eyes, and, without the means of succouring, I saw them perish."

"And may I ask the errand which has brought you to our coasts?"

"That is soon told. To place the seas between me and Mary's power was my first object; and to whichever land the bark was wafted, I cared not, so that it were a strange one. I meant to seek employment in the wars, and wait for better times."

"You have enemies not distant. The garrisons of the English queen hold Galway, Athlone, and Limerick."

"It matters little; few know Hubert de Lacy, and those who do would rather assist than injure the kinsman of the stout old constable."

"Enough — we may talk of this to-morrow. Meanwhile, accept the pledge of Cormac Dhu. I drink to you, Sir Knight, in all honourable trust. Here, in this poor tower, till the storm passes, you may find a secure retreat. My friends and kin are thine — thy foes are Cormac O'Malley's. When thou wouldst heath a steed, or sail a galley, there are yonder green hills, and here a space enough of ocean. Thou wilt find wine upon the board, and music in the hall; and when all these shall weary, thou wilt see the Flying Horse and Red Hand* dancing together in the morning sun, and none between this and the Shannon who dare let our banner. Come, Sir Knight, a stranger is welcome, and a soldier doubly so. This is my noble ally, — and this mine only child. Sit, sir. — Were an hundred marks upon thy head, De Lacy's welcome is bidden;" — and leading the young guest to the bottom of the rude and spacious hall, he placed him beside the Lady Grace, while the lover elect occupied the other seat of honour.

The stranger had soon an opportunity, amid the bustle attending upon the banquet which had just begun, to remark the personages in whom he was chiefly interested. His eyes first turned on the heiress of Cormac Dhu; and he gazed upon that singular female with mixed feelings of fear and admiration. The features were nobly, nay beautifully cast; but then, in that handsome face a more than masculine degree of pride and daring was discernible. Her eagle glance, as it flashed around the company from her sparkling eye, was rather adapted to express a warrior's summons, than convey a woman's wish. Her very dress, whose light and easy folds displayed the symmetry of her faultless figure, appeared too loose for maiden modesty, and more meetly suited for sylvan sport or warlike exercise, than for the high festival of her own betrothment. From the lady his glance next rested on the chief of the Macmahons, and his scrutiny was short and unfavourable. He was a man in middle age, and of uncommon height and strength. His hair, deep, red, and closely curled, spread loosely over his brawny shoulders; — eyes, large, light, gray, and unintelligible; — features, coarse, and undistinguished from the humblest peasant's; and a dress of gay and ill-adapted colours and very unbecoming form, completed the appearance of the long-expected bridegroom.

He was numerously attended by kinsmen and followers, and, from the prevailing colours of their hair and complexion, it was easy for the stranger to imagine whence the appellation of *Red* was given to the Macmahons of Doona.

Meanwhile the feast proceeded gallantly; the tables were loaded with ude and plentiful cheer; while the place of honour was distinguished for

* The cognizance of the clans of O'Malley and Macmahon

a nicer disposition of choicer viands than that displayed at the bottom of the hall. Wine and ale, and aqua vitæ, and other preparations from grain which are now disused and unknown, were profusely supplied to the company without distinction; and, while the harp was heard within, the pipes without announced that a similar scene of festivity was going on. The revelry was at its height, and the minstrels sang, at times, in compliment to the occasion, martial ditties, or the lighter love melodies for which Ireland has been for ages so remarkable. The doughty wooer, although evidently no carpet-knight, vainly essayed to engage his future mistress in conversation: the young stranger appeared to occupy the sole attention of the heiress, and the gay and courtly manner in which he replied to her inquiries, formed a striking contrast to the dull discourse which occasionally fell from her grave and affianced lord. At this moment, a horn was loudly blown at the gate, and a bustle, as if of the introduction of some person of distinction, succeeded. "It is an ill-omened blast, whoever held the horn," said a gray-headed harper, in a whisper, to the young Englishman; and the next moment a man, heated with exercise, and who had evidently just landed from the sea, was duly announced as the brother of Macmahon More. The Lady Grace, waiting but to bid him a hurried welcome, retired with her female followers — and shortly after, the English knight, pleading recent indisposition, rose abruptly from the banquet, and left the festal hall.

CHAPTER V.

When Hubert de Lacy retired from the castle-hall to the monk's apartment, which was situated in a sort of flanking tower without the roof, he found the priest had, some time before, departed on one of the numerous calls which the ordinances of his religion required. The evening had not yet closed in — the air was mild — the breeze, after the heat of the rude banquet, refreshing; and, willing to avoid the numerous groups of strange faces which thronged the court-yard and the harbour, the young Englishman turned out of a narrow postern, that led to a cliff, which seemed to fence the castle westward. There was a rill of water passing at the bottom of the rock, occasionally employed for domestic purposes by the inmates of the fortress, and following a rude flight of steps which led down the precipice to the beach, the young knight pursued his way unchallenged. He reached the beach easily, and turning the shoulder of the rock close to the water's edge, an inland bay of soft and beautiful sand appeared; it was sheltered by cliffs of amazing height, affording to the inmates of the castle a walk, protected from the storm, and safe from observation. De Lacy was but a short distance from the cliff, when two females suddenly approached, from an abrupt rock on the opposite extremity of the sands, and the taller, from her height and bearing, he at once recognised as the chieftain's daughter.

For a moment the stranger felt irresolute, and scarcely knew whether it were better to advance or retire. Were these the private outlets of the castle on which he had so unceremoniously intruded, while all besides were busied with the banquet? Some apology, were his fears true, was requisite, yet assuming as much indifference as he could command, he advanced boldly to meet the Lady of Clare Island.

The attitude of young Grace was noble and queen-like, as she slowly approached, leaning on her companion's shoulder. Exercise, or the unexpected meeting with a stranger, had given a deeper colour to her cheek; and, if the young Englishman was arranging a fit apology for his intrusion

the sparkling welcome of her eye might well have abridged the ceremony. Motioning to her attendant to fall behind, she at once plunged into conversation, leisurely pacing the sands, as she listened to the history of the young knight's wanderings, before he reached the island; and De Lacy could not help noticing the undisguised impatience with which she heard a messenger bear a summons from her father, to say that her presence was wanted in the hall.

"Will you not return, Sir Knight?" De Lacy bowed assent. "They desire my presence," she added, with contemptuous irony, "as an apology for another wine-butt!" Then, as they turned the cliff and mounted to the postern, "The moon is almost full to-night—I shall two hours hence return to the sands; and, if De Lacy prefers the sea-breeze to the wine-cup, he knows the path-way." She said, and turned to her own portion of the tower, while the shipwrecked knight entered the banqueting-hall again.

Much as the native Irish were celebrated by travellers for their attachment to the pleasures of the table, Hubert de Lacy looked at the scene with amazement. Vessels, containing various liquors, and of different qualities, were breached, from which the company were served by experienced sewers. The wine only circulated to a favoured portion of the guests; while aqua vitæ, ale, and usquebaugh, supplied the goblets of the retainers. The plate and drinking-vessels were in every variety of size and fashion, and too surely betrayed the secret that they had been the spoils of war. Sconces and candlesticks hung from the arched roof, or were fastened against the unplaistered walls, which rude and ill-assorted tapestry but partially concealed. The guests appeared under the influence of the revel, and even their practised heads had not been able to repel the deep and sustained debauch which had marked the evening.

One circumstance embarrassed the English knight; the place which he had occupied in the earlier period of the feast was now filled by the youngest of the Macmahons. But one other seat was vacant; and the light blue mantle, which he had observed to have been worn by the Lady Grace, was thrown across that chair, and seemed to retain it for her especial use. Nor was he wrong. While he still stood with his plumed cap in his hand, and irresolute whether to retire or claim a place at the board, the heiress of Clare Island issued from a side door and approached her customary seat. In a moment her falcon glance had searched the chamber, and, when she saw the younger chief occupy the knight's place, her cheek flushed with anger, and her quick eye sought and rested on the youthful stranger. Motioning to her attendants, a stool was placed for the favoured cavalier beside her chair; and, while she honoured the hall with her company, no melody was praised, or harp rewarded, save those that Hubert de Lacy listened to and liked.

This marked attention in the bearing of the Lady Grace to the shipwrecked stranger was not unnoticed. Dark and mischievous looks were interchanged between the young Macmahon and his henchman; and, when the lady rose and left the festive chamber for the night, and shortly afterwards De Lacy retired to his quarters, the chief and his attendant quitted the company unperceived, and, directing their steps to a retired place without the castle walls, beneath the concealment of a large rock, were soon absorbed in conversation.

Nor was Hubert de Lacy on a bed of roses. He, who in days of brighter fortune had fluttered in the suit of his powerful relative about a court, had little difficulty in reading the scarcely concealed secret of an island maiden. Young Grace took little pains to hide her growing passion. She was a bold and wayward woman, and loving with a first love, hers was a temper which would sweep every obstacle from the path that led to happiness, or perish in the effort. De Lacy could not be insensible to the personal

charms of his wild and ardent mistress; but still, now many difficulties attended even a successful suit! A powerful suitor, accepted by her father, and whose claims were supported by five hundred swords, was on the spot. Dare she reject his alliance, — and for whom? — a friendless and proscribed stranger, saved with difficulty from the sea, and only living by the sufferance of a rude islander, who at any hour could remove him, if it became desirable, by replacing him in the possession of the jealous tyrant from whose doom he had escaped. And, even these obstacles overcome — and they were many and appalling — what would be his future fate? — Consort of a woman, who from childhood had never seen her will disputed, or her wishes disobeyed; cooped up in a rocky island, or confined within that wild and extensive district of uncultivated soil, which was a sort of debateable land between the English invaders and the native Irish, and whose best right of tenure depended on the sharpest sword, — was this to be his destiny — he who had once held a lofty head among the proudest peers of France and England, and had looked forward to achieve the highest honours that chivalry could bestow? These were melancholy reflections; and, with a heavy heart, De Lacy wrapped his horse-cloak round him, and tortured by past visions of palmy times, bent his course to the sandy inlet. The moon was nearly at the full, and the warder on the keep had called the hour and changed the watch, as he always did at midnight. Lights were flashing from the hall-windows, and, judging from the tingling of harps and sound of bagpipes, the revelry continued unabated. All the guests and inmates were joyously engaged, except the band to whom the custody of the tower was intrusted; and, from the insecurity of the period, this duty was as rigorously attended to as if the visit of the Macmahons had been for a very different purpose than to cement an eternal union of names and interests by an intended marriage. Unquestioned and unremarked, De Lacy descended the steps in the rock, and, turning round the cliff, at a little distance on the sands, appeared the object of his search. She was alone — even Una had not accompanied her; and, enveloped in the ample folds of the yellow mantle — the favourite garment of Irish females of higher birth — she leisurely paced the sands, as the tide, now nearly at the full, rippled on the beach, scarcely displacing a pebble, so gentle were its approaches.

They met, and both were embarrassed. "'T is a fair night," said De Lacy, as he broke silence. "How fierce a contrast did that wild evening exhibit, when, lady, I first saw this rock-bound coast. Alas! but little hope remained that I should gain the shore, when all beside failed to reach it; and, certes, to touch the beach were trifling service, had not thy gentle offices, my sweet protector, restored the half-dead wanderer."

"You overrate my service, noble sir; and to see that I had succeeded more than paid its guerdon. And yet, at times, I wish thy bark had reached the main, and touched some other shores than these, so thou hadst met with kindly usage."

"Have I offended thee, lady?" exclaimed De Lacy; "have I presumed upon thy goodness, and in aught been wanting in respect?"

"No, stranger; another cause of different import to idle courtesy, would cause the wish I uttered. I would speak to thee; and for the first time within my memory do I hesitate to give utterance boldly to my thoughts. Perish this weakness! — Cormac O'Malley's child needs not to hide her sentiments. Listen, stranger; and I conjure thee, by every tie of honour, to answer me as faithfully as if thou wert before the confessional. Speak but roundly to me — the truth I fear not — and the spur upon thy heel, for that, is surety enough." She stopped, looked at him in the full moonlight, and then continued — "Stranger, I know thy lineage and thy kindred, and both are noble; thy fortunes are shattered, thy prospects sadly overcast.

I know the tyrant queen has turned her bitterest displeasure against thy house; and none in England dare harbour or reset one of the unhappy constable's followers for a night. If thou hast cherished dreams of future honour, the path to it in thine own land is closed against thee. Thy lands are confiscated — thy life proscribed: hast thou aught to bind thee to thy country— or is every land where the brave are welcome the same to thee?"

"Thou hast," said the young soldier, "but too truly shown me what I am. I have outlived friends and fortune; and, save from the charity of the world, I have little to claim. But surely the wars are not all ended, lady; and if I cannot hew my road to honour, I have poorly profited by my breeding under the best soldier of the age. Nay, lady — though, by the mass! things can scarce be worse with me — more broken barks than mine have reached a harbour gallantly."

"Yes, Hubert, but how many have perished miserably in the essay? — Look to thine own galley for a similitude. The chances of any in the ship were equal to thine own, when the storm rose; yet of twenty souls and more, thou alone art living; and thus, to achieve good fortune, when fate once frowns, for one that makes his footing good a score will never clear the quicksands."

"And must I despair, lady? I, with youthful blood, a noble lineage, my kinsman's schooling, and my father's sword? No, no, — once within hearing of drum and trumpet, — then, false queen! thy worst is over!"

The Lady of Clare Island had touched, unconsciously, a chord she did not wish to waken; and yet, as she marked the bold and martial spirit she had unwittingly lighted up, the young stranger became doubly dear to her congenial soul. They had now reached a rock, which, rising precipitously at the end of the cove, flung its long shade across the moon-lit sands. The daughter of Cormac Dhu stopped; there was a momentary silence; but with the apparent determination to keep her purpose, she firmly continued —

"Hubert de Lacy," and the words were tremulously spoken, and her eyes turned upon the shore; "the words which are about to fall from my lips were never heard by man. Seventeen years have passed, and I saw none for whom I would resign my own free will. Fate or providence — be it which you please — drove you hither on the wings of the tempest. Wilt thou then, young knight, forget lost kindred; wilt thou, give up fields of fame and thoughts of glory; wilt thou abandon all — and in return, a heart that never bore man's image but thy own, will love thee as the brave deserve? This island, my kin, my followers, shall be thine — mine shall be thy friends, and mine thy enemies. Let words bespeak the feelings of the courtly dame — let deeds prove the passion of the island princess. Wilt thou then be mine — and mine only?"

The knight threw himself at the feet of his wild and passionate mistress, and the next moment England and all his dreams of chivalry were forgotten. — Locked in his arms, he held Cormac's daughter to his bosom, and swore, as he pressed her lips to his, that his love and faith should be eternal.

The hourly call which was repeated through the night from the tower of the castle, warned them that morning was at hand; and while the knight's arm encircled the lady tenderly, and her plighted hand was fondly clasped in his, they slowly prepared to return. But ere they had issued from the shelter of the cliffs, Cormac's daughter suddenly grasped the hand she held, and pointing to the line of rocks that flanked the cove, as, partly hid and partly revealed, it was occasionally disclosed by the moonlight, she signed with her finger to a hollow in the ridge, and there De Lacy noticed two human figures couched and closely sheltered, as if in the attitude of watching.

"They are no followers of our family," said the companion of the knight;

"I mark the difference of their dress, and the place in which they stand proves them to be strangers. They would have been nearer listeners if they could. —Come, Hubert, we have much to manage, and ere morning dawns, half the difficulties which beset us now shall be removed. 'T were pity, too, yon eavesdroppers should fancy they have been undiscovered sentinels." They had now issued into the bright moonlight, and Grace dropped her lover's arm, as she looked attentively to the chasm in the rocks where the midnight spies were ambushed. The movement of the lady and her lover appeared to have caused a change in theirs. Perceiving the objects of their espionage were returning, they raised their persons more into the moonlight, and the outlines of the figures were now distinct.

"It can be but Macmahon Beg, and probably his foster-brother. 'T is but a poor return for honest welcome to trace his host's child, and waylay her if she but chooses a cool walk upon the sands at midnight. — To thy beds, fellows!" she exclaimed, with a voice that startled her companion; and next moment, disengaging a pistol from the folds of her loose cloak, she pointed it where the figures had just been seen, and the sharp report echoed over the cliffs, and startled the sea-birds from their rocks, who made the air ring with their piercing whistle. But their solitude was not so undisturbed by mortal contiguity as the knight had fancied. On the report of fire-arms, Una rushed from a recess in a rock at no great distance. To a question from De Lacy, as to whether any notice would be taken at the tower of a noise that must have been overheard; "No, dearest, some brawler will bear the blame — and now to part, De Lacy. — Early shalt thou hear from me." Then, folded in his arms, she bade the saints to bless him, and, attended by Una, the lady sought her chamber, while the knight, after many a fond adieu, turned to the quarters of the churchman.

CHAPTER VI.

The cell of the monk, as the arched apartment he occupied might be properly termed, was left in undisturbed possession of Hubert de Lacy, as the confessor had not returned. Speedily he sought his humble couch, and, fatigued by the strange and unexpected occurrences of the day, the young knight slept long and soundly, and though morning was well advanced, he was still a-bed, when a follower of the chief's announced that his presence was required in the hall.

When he entered the chamber of audience, which last night had been the scene of rude debauch, he found the remnants of the feast had been carefully removed, and that they had given place to a plentiful morning repast. From the insular situation of Cormac's territories, sea and shell fish were abundant; while red game from the hills, and venison from the forest, diversified the more cumbrous joints of beef and mutton, which covered the table in profusion: liquors were abundantly supplied by the attendants, and a stoup of Bourdeaux wine graced the top of the board, while stout ale and other liquids of more potent strength circulated among the less distinguished of the company.

The chief of the Macmahons and his brother, with the principal of his relatives and clan, were already seated when De Lacy entered. A seat beside the elder chief was pointed out by Cormac Dhu as that assigned for the stranger: the young knight occupied it in silence; and when he looked around, observed that no chair had been reserved for the Lady Grace, and, consequently, that she was not expected to join the company.

His next attention was turned to the kinsman of Macmahon; and when his eyes met those of the lesser chief, he thought that his countenance

betrayed the consciousness, that the preceding night he had been a spy upon his interview. The meal passed heavily: Cormac seemed lost in thought — Macmahon, like a man awaiting a trying and important crisis — while his brother talked in whispers to his confidential follower, and the other guests awaited, in silence, the result.

The scene to all was disagreeable. Every effort to provoke hospitality on Cormac's part was forced, and the bearing of his visiters was uneasy and constrained. At last, the meal was over: the Red Chief, pointing to the sun upon the wall, remarked the morning waned apace; and Cormac, with an evident exertion, desired the tables to be drawn, and, when the hall was cleared, that the Lady Grace should be requested to attend her father's pleasure.

The commands of the Lord of Clare Island were promptly executed, and the well-remembered chair arranged for the accommodation of his daughter. The messenger returned, announcing that the Lady would presently attend; and while every eye was bent upon the side door by which she was expected, and every guest waited her appearance impatiently, she entered the hall, followed by her maidens, and supported by the priest; and, with a step indicating firm resolve, and the air and dignity of a queen, she took the seat reserved, and placed herself beside her father.

She was dressed that morning with studied care. Her rich silk robe displayed the fine proportions of her form; a band of Indian pearls confined her raven hair; and the curch or snood she wore, to mark her maidenhood, was studded thick with sparkling stones. One ornament did not escape her lover's observation — it was a poignard of exquisite workmanship, secured in her girdle in a sheath of chased silver. The weapon was not concealed; for when her robe occasionally parted, the jewelled handle sparkled in the sunshine. The Lady Grace, assured as her bearing was, bore evidently the traces of a mind diseased: she was unusually pale, and seemed preparing for some approaching trial, which would prove her courage, and try her resolution. Whatever might be her apprehensions of the event, she determined to mask her fears; for, when the young knight's eyes for a moment encountered hers, he read in them expressive firmness and endurance.

The entrance of the heiress of Clare Island was succeeded by a long and embarrassing silence. The suitor made several painful efforts to address the object of his pursuit, and Cormac was nervous and uncomfortable. At last, the Lady Grace, in a low but steady voice, requested to be informed "upon what occasion her presence was required where females did not usually intrude?"

"I have sent for thee, my girl, at the desire of my noble friend. Though thou art young, Grace, more than one has already sought thee in marriage; and now the Red Macmahon has come here to form an alliance with our ancient house. I am getting old; thou art my only stay; and where can I procure thee a better mate, and myself a stouter ally, than in the chieftain of Doona?"

Cormac Dhu was not unmoved when he spoke of his daughter's union, while she listened to his words with breathless attention. She would have replied, but the Red Chief rose and addressed her.

"Lady," said Macmahon, "I am but little used to courtly speech. The fame of thy beauty, and to win the friendship of thy name and kin, induced me to come hither. I expected much, and what I saw more than realized all I had fancied. Lady, the towns of Doona will receive thee as their mistress — every wood and hill that owns the dominion of the Red Macmahons shall dower thee — an hundred horsemen shall ride at thy bidding; — and no baron's wife within the Pale shall number more pages and waiting-women. If thy wish can be accomplished inside the Shannon, it shall be

gratified; and Macmahon's bride need but speak her orders, and see them executed.

The chieftain ceased. Grace rose without hesitation, and firmly and unembarrassed thus spoke her determination—

"It grieves me much, that neither to gratify a father, nor pleasure an honoured guest, can I reply to the proposition I have heard, but to dismiss it. Nay, Macmahon, bear with me patiently; for I own the honour you have offered, and willingly would part with you in anything but anger. Thou art some forty-five years old—and I have seen but seventeen summers. Thinkest thou, chief, these years of ours are suitable? Yon hawk upon the beam would not take wilder flights than I, if once I found my liberty was shackled. When thou wast absent from Doona, think you that I would mew myself within the walls, or perch upon the watch-tower, wearying heaven with aves for thy safety? No, knight—where hound could stretch, and hawk could fly, and horse could follow—there would I be. At thy years, the battle field, or merry board, are better suited than the lady's bower; or if thou wilt wed, if thy lineage demands an heir—seek thy consort in sober womanhood; nor peril her happiness and thy own in mating with a giddy girl. I mean thee no offence, Macmahon. I have counselled thee, it may be, somewhat plainly, but, on my soul, I have advised thee honestly. Let there be no unkindness between us;—and if thou wilt hereafter change thy state, be the choice but as I advise thee, and thou wilt not repent it.—Farewell." As she spoke, she rose, and left the hall; and though Cormac in vain expressed his deep displeasure, and the rejected lover and his followers with difficulty controlled their anger, the bold girl passed from the chamber with a dauntless step, that showed how truly had she spoken her fixed determination.

A short and stormy discussion succeeded her departure. All that Cormac Dhu could say, to soften the refusal of his daughter, was unavailing; and, in turn, he too became irritated. When, at times, the priest's exhortations appeared to succeed partially in allaying the discontent, and the chief's displeasure was likely to subside, Connel Macmahon invariably renewed the disturbance, till at length the whole of the red clan declared they would leave the island. Notwithstanding the good offices of the more peaceable of the respective septs were exerted, the attempt to soften the supposed offence was unsuccessful, and the Macmahons, instead of cementing an eternal alliance with their island neighbours, returned to the main, sensitive of insult, and thirsting for revenge.

De Lacy, when words waxed high, had quitted the scene of confusion. He strolled to the harbour, and was lost in vague conjectures how affairs would probably terminate. While still a prey to uncertainty, the bustle of the seamen was apparent among the galleys of the visiters. Presently he saw the chief embark, the attendants hurried after, and in a short time but one of the Macmahons remained upon the island.

The boat was waiting for him—and as he hastened down the pathway to the beach, he passed De Lacy. Both were alone. The younger Macmahon, for it was he, stopped and addressed the stranger: "Sir Knight," he said, "my house, it seems, are heavily thy debtors. My brother sought a wife, but thou hadst already mated the lady to her liking. I owe thee too, a well-directed bullet; though but a random shot, it was a close one, for a splinter from the rock struck me here slightly," and he pointed to a trifling scar upon his cheek. "I will repay both obligations, and our next meeting shall have a different parting—farewell." Darting a look of hatred on De Lacy, which the knight returned with one of scorn and contempt, Macmahon was speedily abroad—and long before evening, the galleys had entered Achil Sound, and disappeared among the bold highlands that enclose it.

Cormac Dhu, after the unexpected departure of his visiters, remained in moody thought. The effort to turn an enemy to a friend had failed, and a feud, almost worn out, was now unluckily renewed; and, instead of a season of repose, a wild and harassing contest with the Macmahons might be anticipated. It was true, that to the remoter portions of the sept, who inhabited the greater islands, this feud would be far from unpopular, for they detested the Macmahons, and witnessed any attempt to heal the breach with feelings of disapprobation. But his own residence was continually exposed to aggression, and Cormac saw, that in his old days, the same feudal insecurity would require exertion, when age and abated vigour should rather obtain repose. No wonder then, that De Lacy found the dinner-meal a sad contrast to the festal scene of yesterday: and as the limited number of the guests recalled the untoward event that thinned his hall, it was not surprising that Cormac Dhu was chagrined at the unhappy issue of his matrimonial schemes, and the sudden dispersion of his visiters.

Evening came.— Cormac drank as if he would drown care, and the harper's song was sad and spiritless; a general restraint was on the company, which even the quick circulation of the wine-cup could not remove. De Lacy felt the sombre influence of those around infect him, and to escape from the gloom which the unforeseen termination of the intended alliance between Clare Island and Doona had caused, he rose from the table, and walked to the same sands that he had last visited at midnight.

The hour was mild and beautiful — the wind had fallen, and the sea, — a rare event on that exposed coast, was as smooth and waveless as a lady's mirror. Some curraghs,* with island children on board, were fishing for breams and gunners off the rocks; but, warned by the fading light, they pulled in upon the sands, and, carrying their skiffs beyond the reach of the tide, set off for the hamlet beneath the castle walls, to enjoy the produce of their evening fishing.

How quiet and deserted seemed the island now, contrasted by the preceding turmoil attendant on the visit of the Macmahons. Not a sound was audible, while last night the hurry of the banquet, the rivalry of minstrels, and the ruder festivities of those who feasted without the castle walls, almost confused the listener. Then De Lacy was in undisputed solitude, and he paced the cove thoughtfully, wondering what new adventure fortune had in store, and marvelling of what colour his future fate might be.

While lost in meditation, a light step crossed the sands unheeded, and a person was beside him, even before he noticed an approach. Although the coarse gray scarf, worn by the fishers' wives, partially disguised her, the young knight recognised in his companion Una, the favourite attendant of his mistress.

"I have been watching from the tower, Sir Knight, and as the shadows lengthened, I expected to have seen your plume and mantle long since fluttering on the shore. When wine flows, love is forgotten — so says our Irish adage, and, I 'm sure, my lady thinks it true this evening. Certes, fair sir, the last raid of Cormac Dhu must have been unusually important, or the broken voice of gray Diarmid been restored to manly power, when the young knight would loiter over cup and ballad, and leave his lady-love to watch the sun sinking in the ocean, and count the minutes till he left off carousing."

"Nay, pretty one, you tax me wrongfully; the hours were winged with lead; and I almost swore that the sun himself was stationary. The old man's strings jarred upon every nerve, — and by my faith, Cormac was but in sorry humour, and spoke little of his ridings. A more monkish festival was never seen within a castle-hall; and when I dared depart without

* Skiffs covered with horse-skins

remark, the fawn never sought the moonlit glen more joyfully, than I stole here to meet my gentle mistress; — but where tarries she?"

"Marked you the little chapel that lies among the rocks, a bow-shot from the tower? It is but in poor repair — Heaven pardon him! buttress and battlement are Cormac's care, rather than the altar of our blessed patroness. See yonder path winding up the cliff that leads to it; the cross and holy well will guide you. In an hour hence the light will fail, and then no straggling step will wander thither. The Lady Grace will there expect you; — farewell, and recollect the path." As she spoke she bounded from his side; and, taking the direction that she informed him led to the ruined chapel, he saw her disappear among the rocks.

And was he to know his fate so soon? In one short hour the appointed interview would solve all doubts — for his wild mistress would act decisively. Never was hour so long; gradually the night fell; objects were no longer visible; the moon peeped over the lofty pinnacle of shattered granite, which forms the apex of the island; and, guided by the twilight, Hubert de Lacy took the path among the rocks, to meet the chieftain's daughter.

Directed by the cross and well, he soon saw the dark outline of the place of rendezvous. It was an ancient and half-dilapidated edifice, dedicated to our Lady of Grace, the favourite protector of the O'Malleys. In return for some especial interference in his behalf, an ancestor of Cormac had built and gifted the little chapelry; but in the turmoil of secular affairs, it would appear that his successors had small leisure or inclination to perfect his pious intentions. The chapel soon sunk into disuse. A hurried mass, celebrated in the castle hall, was all these stirring times could afford; and, excepting on the rare occasions of a wedding or a funeral, the chapel of our Lady of Grace was seldom visited by Cormac or his reckless followers. Hither the young knight directed his steps. When he turned the ledge of rock, which partially concealed the building from his view, a stream of torchlight flashed from the little oriel; and, from the number of shadows thrown upon the wall and roof, he was apprized that the Lady Grace had several companions in the chapel.

He crossed himself as he passed the low-browed Saxon door-way, and advanced to the rude altar, beside which, and surrounded by several male and female followers, the lady and the priest were already standing. Hubert remarked that the dresses of both were different from those used on ordinary occasions; for the churchman wore his stole, and his mistress was habited in white. Two armed men bore the torches, whose flare had guided him through the rocks; and the light, the place, and the company, struck young De Lacy as very unlike the scene which should attend a lover's interview. He approached Cormac's daughter respectfully, and while the confessor bestowed his blessing on the knight, in a soft whisper he asked her "what meant the ceremony that seemed in preparation."

"De Lacy," said the lady, in that grave and quiet tone, which, in persons of uncontrolled and ardent temperament is so striking and impressive, — "De Lacy, when we last parted, I promised that no obstacles should interrupt our union, and I will keep my pledge; I have done much to wed thee; I have a clan's prejudices to a stranger yet to conquer; I have a parent's blessing yet to win — but to the determined nothing is impossible. I might have waited patiently till time had effected this; but other considerations make even a father's benison and a clan's approval but secondary objects. My fame will suffer on the main. Some cause, however false, must be assigned to my rejection of Macmahon. Your accidental sojourn on the island will afford a pretext for their scandal; and yon mean eavesdropper saw and heard enough to confirm the story of my frailty. But let them not hope to disgrace my father's child. Girl as she is, spite of their malice, she will hold her fair name unsullied; and this night makes thee and me one,

or this night parts us for ever. De Lacy," she continued solemnly, "here, in the chapel of our Lady, — here, before this holy shrine, I ask thee if thou canst pledge thy faith to me, and if none, by promise or pre-contract, can claim thy hand and heart?" She paused, and the churchman repeated the interrogatory.

"Lady, here, in this holy place, I swear my vows were never plighted to another; and here I offer them with this poor hand to thee."

"Enough, Sir Knight — and thus Grace O'Malley becomes thine for ever. Now, father, do thy office."

Before the ruined altar of our Lady of Grace the English adventurer and the heiress of Clare Island exchanged their vows. Solemn as the time and the occasion was, one circumstance occurred which might have been considered ominous of the future. The churchman noticed the weapon that Grace invariably carried, sparkle in her bosom, as kneeling at the altar, she displaced her robe, and signed that she should put it away. But, with a slight wave of her hand, she rejected the monk's counsel; and muttering that "steel to an O'Malley was as natural as book to priest," the ceremony proceeded.

The young knight took possession of apartments in the tower adjoining those of his beautiful bride; and, as Cormac occupied a different wing of the fortress, the household, if they remarked the change of De Lacy's quarters, made no observation, and things progressed in the island as quietly as they had done before the handsome Englishman was shipwrecked on its rock-bound shores.

CHAPTER VII.

THREE months passed — Christmas and its joyous season brought the feast, the dance, and the song. Winter, on that wild coast, prevented the retainers of Cormac Dhu from visiting frequently the main land. The feud with the Macmahons had almost been forgotten; for, like the island chief, the Master of Doona thought more of keeping Christmas jollily, than of taking vengeance for being disappointed in a wife; and it seemed probable that, in a short time, the breach between the rival houses might have been healed, and Cormac and the Red Chieftain again meet, in social intercourse, under the same roof-tree.

If a period of plenty and repose was acceptable to the feudal and family retainers of Cormac Dhu, this tranquil season was doubly dear to Hubert de Lacy and his young bride. Love appeared to have wrought a singular change in Grace O'Malley; — that high and daring spirit had melted into woman's tenderness, and, as she idolized her English lord, she seemed to only live when in his presence. Nor was Hubert insensible to her charms and strong attachment: he loved her tenderly, and, while his passion was less romantic, it was steady, ardent, and sincere. Grace, from her masculine habits, was his constant and favourite companion. If he flew a hawk, or coursed a hare, his mistress shared the sport. Accustomed from infancy to ride the half-tamed and ill-managed horses of the island, her admirable horsemanship enabled her to traverse the most difficult and hazardous paths; and De Lacy seldom visited the mountain districts of the island, without being accompanied by his bold and beautiful companion.

Six months wore on — April came in with smiles and showers, and the household of Cormac Dhu were deeply engaged in agricultural pursuits; for at that period the half-military establishment of an Irish chief occupied their peaceful hours in preparing food and forage for times when other duties would demand their absence in the field, or oblige them to seek shelter in their places of strength from an enemy too powerful to be openly opposed.

Meanwhile De Lacy had found favour in the sight of Cormac. The military information he had acquired under his gallant relation the constable, was calculated to raise him in the estimation of the rude warrior; and occasionally he gratified the island chief, by instructing his wild horsemen in the chivalrous exercises practised by the English cavalry. Hubert was gentle and unassuming; brave, without being arrogant, he soon became popular with the clan of Cormac Dhu; and, as her decided preference for the stranger had scarcely been concealed by the heiress of Clare Island, all asserted that the knight and the lady were solemnly engaged, while not a few insinuated that they were already married.

Time, however, must soon have disclosed the secret. The altered looks of Grace had already betrayed her situation to her more immediate followers, and the churchman had been admonished to prepare her father for the disclosure.

An event at this time happened which occasioned a sensation in the island. Hugh Macmahon, commonly designated by the epithet of More or Big, from his tall and powerful form, was found dead in his apartment, and, having died childless, was succeeded by his younger brother. While the big chief lived, from his indolent and good-natured disposition, little evil consequences were to be apprehended from the unhappy miscarriage of his love-suit; but now, every thing was to be dreaded from the temper of his successor. Connell was daring and revengeful—a man who was said never to forgive an injury, and never to forget it till it was avenged. He was of an active and restless temper; and many of Cormac's ancient retainers predicted that the coming winter would be very dissimilar to the quiet and peaceful season they had so lately passed.

The island of Achil, which lay between the possessions of the O'Malleys and Macmahons, was then but thinly inhabited. A few sea-coast villages were scattered along its shores, which were washed by the waves of the Atlantic, and a small number of sheep and diminutive black cattle pastured in the few glens and valleys, that could afford them forage and shelter. A feeble and unwarlike clan of the O'Donnels then lived almost entirely by fishing, and from their poverty and unmilitary habits, they were little regarded or disturbed by their more martial neighbours the O'Malleys and Macmahons. Game was extremely abundant in the woods and mountains of Achil. The red-deer were then in tolerable numbers, and from the contiguity of the island to the castles of Clare island and Doona, it frequently formed the hunting grounds on which the respective chieftains exercised their hounds and horses.

De Lacy had often crossed from his own island to pass the day in Achil. The distance was but a league from the nearest point. Grace had hitherto been his companion; but, no longer able to share the fatigues and dangers of the chase, she was reluctantly necessitated to see her lord depart without her, and watch from her lonely tower, till, when evening came, his sails danced upon the waters, and the wearied hunter returned to the arms of his mistress wife.

The priest had already commenced his embassy; and on the next day Cormac was to be apprized that he had in the English knight a son-in-law, and that in two months more his ancient lineage would receive the addition of an heir. De Lacy had departed at day-light upon a hunting party into Achil, attended, as he generally was, by the foster-brother of his lady, and some five or six of the hardiest and boldest of his clan. Noon passed, and the day to Grace appeared interminable. She sat in the upper chamber o. the tower, with her anxious eyes turned to the sandy bay in Achil, where her lover landed, and whence she would first see his light sails stealing over the ocean, and wafting her tired huntsman to his beloved home. Evening gradually closed; the sunshine flashed upon the waves, but not a bark was seen dancing in their rich and crimson glow. Seldom had De

Lacy left her so early — never had he delayed so late. Night came — where could the truant dally? The wind was brisk, the tide was favourable — but still no bark, no lover came. Tortured with anxiety, her fiery and ardent temper, that could badly brook restraint, blazed forth in all its violence. Spurning the entreaties of her attendants, she rushed to the harbour and ordered out a galley; — a hundred men were instantly in action; the keel already grated on the sand, as by main force the bark was hurried to the water; when, through the gloom, the sound of oars was heard, and a boat at no great distance feebly requested assistance from the shore. Instantly two skiffs were launched. Who could the distressed boatmen be? Alas! suspense was only momentary, for De Lacy, wounded to the death, and three surviving attendants, were landed on the beach.

The English knight was carried to the tower, and the monk, who was promptly summoned, pronounced his injuries to be mortal. Grace, while a hope remained, exhausted every means to sooth his sufferings; but when she marked his fading eye, and felt the slackening pressure of his hand, other thoughts appeared to possess her. She heard from his own lips the sad detail, and while the agonies of death were hard upon him, he told his loved mistress the story of his death.

He had landed from the galley with his companions, and took the direction towards the hills of Currane, a favourite haunt of red-deer. When some miles from the beach, a man dressed as an island herdsman met the huntsmen, apparently by accident, and informed them that he had disturbed, in a valley, at no great distance, a noble stag, who seemed to be an outlier. He had sheltered in an adjacent coppice, and, as but an hour had elapsed, there was little fear that he had been a second time unharboured. The ardent sportsmen, gratified at the intelligence, pressed the islander to conduct them to the coppice, to which he assented with readiness. As they proceeded under the guidance of the stranger, the foster-brother of his lady observed to the English knight, that their conductor appeared more intelligent than the islanders generally were; and, on being questioned touching his name and occupation, he gave an embarrassed reply, and named a remote village as his place of residence. They had now entered a deep and tangled glen; and the herdsman pointed to a clump of brushwood and overgrown fern, as the spot where the stag was harboured. — "And thou art from Keeim?" said a young attendant: "do the villagers there carry the beards of the Macmahons?" as he pointed to the red and bushy moustaches of the guide. — "Aye, and their weapons too," was the reply, as he drew a middoge suddenly, and struck to the heart the laughing youth that questioned him. The desperate deed was but the signal for general slaughter. Up sprang a score of the Macmahons, and half the hunter band were stretched on the heath before they apprehended treachery, so sudden had been the onslaught of the assassins. But though surprised and overpowered, the few survivors made a fierce and manly resistance. De Lacy proved himself worthy of the gallant name he had already won in arms. Two of the assailants fell beneath his rapier, and, encouraged by his example, the few O'Malleys fought coolly and desperately. The combat was nearly doubtful, when a harquebuss was fired from behind, by the person who seemed to command the assailants. The shot entered the back of the young leader; and on his fall his few surviving followers were beaten from the glen, and retired, fighting still, though all were severely wounded.

"I lay upon the ground," said the dying youth, as he held the hand of his beloved lady feebly pressed within his own relaxing grasp. "I saw my brave companions oppressed by numbers and driven from the glen. One of the assassins turned from the pursuit; he approached and stood over me. I remembered the face well — the revengeful countenance of Connel Macmahon scowled upon me as he placed his foot upon my neck in

scorn; he pointed to the weapon from which my death-wound came—"Was not my bullet, in this wild glen, young Sasenach, truer than thine among the moon-lit rocks of yonder island? Her who slighted me once for thee, thou shalt never see again—and, mark me, ere a year rolls over, Connel Macmahon shall share that proud one's bed or he shall sleep as lowly as thyself, my fallen enemy." I fainted—more I know not, than that I was borne off by the accidental arrival of some shepherds, whom, when accidentally passing near, the clash of weapons attracted to the spot." The little narrative was with difficulty finished, when, with a look of love, Grace felt a feeble pressure. She bent her lips to his, and Hubert de Lacy's last sigh mingled with her kiss.

For some minutes the daughter of Cormac Dhu stood, in silent agony, gazing on her dead lover. "Is this a dream," she muttered—"and can this be my own brave and beautiful knight?" She pressed her forehead wildly, and again she gazed upon the corpse. "Grace, thou hast much to do,—and but a twelvemonth, Hubert, until thy rival shares my bed. The time was short, Macmahon, but thou shalt keep thy pledge!" Then, having calmly issued the necessary orders for the body being prepared for the funeral honours, fitting the high dignity of the chieftain of the family, she left the chamber of death to visit that of her afflicted father.

None mourned the untimely fate of his brave son-in-law more than Cormac Dhu. The secret marriage was forgotten, and he sincerely lamented the loss of one who would have been a stay for his declining age, and a fit protector for his beloved daughter. To the clan De Lacy's kindliness of manner and knightly accomplishments had generally endeared him. All mourned for the gentle Englishman save one; and, while the rudest islander never approached the bier where the corpse rested in the castle hall, without betraying the deepest sorrow, Grace O'Malley was never seen to shed a tear. After the first paroxysm of grief subsided, she permitted not a complaint to escape her lips; for other objects occupied her soul—a fierce and devouring passion engrossed her thoughts—idle lamentations she left to others, for

> "Vengeance—brooding o'er the slain,
> Had locked the source of softer wo,
> And burning pride and high disdain
> Forbade the rising tear to flow.

At midnight, before the corpse was carried to the tomb of the O'Malleys, she collected the chiefs of the clan around the coffin of De Lacy, and upon the dead man's hand, swore with them individually, to avenge the murder of her lord; and, when the body was laid in its last resting place, and, amid tears and wailings, all beside mourned the premature death of the gallant knight, she saw the remains of him she loved hidden from her sight with terrible composure, that seemed to the trembling churchman as more akin to madness than religion. "Alas! daughter," the old man whispered, as he gazed on her white garments, and, in place of rosary and relic, perceived a dagger sparkling in her girdle, "Is this a season for such a dress and such an ornament? What wouldst thou, my child?"

"Revenge him first, and weep for him afterwards!" she calmly answered, as she hurried from the cemetery, and sought the tower-chamber where none were permitted from that hour to enter but her favourite attendant.

CHAPTER VIII.

In the short period that elapsed between the marriage of Grace O'Malley and the treacherous murder of her lord, Mary, of bigot memory, died, and Elizabeth ascended the throne of England. In the late reign, Ireland had occupied but little attention from this wretched queen, as, from the poverty of the country, no revenues could be extracted to assist her in raising the immense subsidies which she supplied to the Spanish consort, who despised her. To maintain the English authority in Ireland, a large military force, and, consequently, a considerable outlay of treasure, was required: this was not the policy of the miserable tool of Philip, and hence the affairs of Ireland were little cared for, and the country left to be governed as it best might.

Although the English dominion was established for nearly four centuries, and the native princes and chiefs, rent by internal divisions, acknowledged and deferred to a power they were not able to shake off, still, as no permanent force was maintained by the conquerors, this conditional allegiance was merely observed when it suited the objects and fancies of the conquered; and the island was eternally disturbed by the heads of the different septs declaring themselves independent of England, whenever inclination or interest required. Other circumstances fostered this insubordination, and increased the national animosity. The English army were never regularly paid while employed in Ireland; but, placed at free quarters upon the natives, were suffered by their leaders to commit military excesses with impunity, which rendered them odious to the Irish. Hence a deadly and rooted animosity arose between the settlers and the aborigines; insecurity of life and property resulted; one while, the Irish were driven to the woods, and hunted down like beasts; at another, their conquerors were chased from their acquired possessions, and cooped within their places of strength. Insurrections broke frequently out; and so implacable had the feelings between the parties grown, that those suspected of any friendly disposition to the invaders were denounced by the Irish, and, in several instances, treated by their countrymen with unmitigated cruelty.*

But the remote districts of Connaught had, as yet, experienced little inconvenience from the thrall of England. The impracticability of the country, and its wild and dangerous shores, made them, by sea or land, equally hazardous of approach; and, even were natural difficulties overcome, to maintain a hostile attitude, separated alike from succours and supplies, would be impossible. Hence the English rarely advanced beyond their chain of positions, which communicated with Munster; and, perfectly contented if the western clans would confine themselves within their native fastnesses, they left them to their private feuds, and postponed their subjugation, till a pacification of the interior would enable them with safety to carry their arms into a country locally remote, and covered and protected by natural obstructions.

Meanwhile, six months elapsed since the murder of De Lacy, and the inhabitants of Clare Island reckoned but two events of interest. One was the accouchement of the Lady Grace, who safely gave birth to a daughter. Were any proofs necessary of the spirit and thoughts that possessed the

* This animosity to the English was carried so far, that, in an insurrection raised by the two sons of the Earl of Clanricarde, they put to the sword all the inhabitants of Athenry, though Irish, because they had begun to conform to English customs, and had embraced a more civilized form of life than had been followed by their ancestors — *Ware's Antiquities, fol. 673*

widowed daughter of Cormac Dhu, the circumstances attendant on the birth of the infant would afford them. Bound by a solemn vow, she herself rejected the customary rites which females joyfully receive from holy church after that hour of trial; while the babe remained unsprinkled by the baptismal water, and unacknowledged as a denizen of the Catholic church. This singular conduct almost led the clan to believe that grief had disturbed her intellects; but there was a superior degree of ability evinced in the method with which she directed her father's affairs, that indicated anything but an impaired understanding.

The second and more recent event was singular and unexpected — it was the arrival of a messenger from Connell Macmahon, actually bearing a matrimonial overture to the Lady of Clare Island.

The purport of his approach being communicated to the Lady Grace, she ordered the hall to be duly prepared to give the envoy audience. Dressed with studied effect, and surrounded by her relations and clan, she formally demanded the object of his coming; when the messenger of Red Macmahon officially acquainted her with his business. Rising with majesty, she demanded if his errand was told. The envoy signified his assent. "And what say you, kinsmen and friends, I ask, should be the widow's answer to the murderer of her lord?"

A deep and vengeful yell burst from the infuriated crowd. "Come hither, boy," she said, addressing a youth of fifteen, whom curiosity had induced to mingle in the throng. — "Thy father perished with my noble husband: what wouldst thou from his murderers?" — "Blood!" cried the boy, as his eyes shot lightning glances at the messenger. — "Thy wish shall be gratified: — bind that traitor hand and foot!" In spite of outcry and resistance, the order was promptly executed. "Give him a knife — now take me off the villain's ears — close to the root, boy!" It was done effectually; and, enclosed in parchment, and directed to his master, the ears were placed in the pocket of the mutilated wretch, who was flogged to the boat that waited for him.

As may be anticipated, a desperate and deadly feud between the O'Malleys and Macmahons ensued. Both parties were, however, chiefly on the defensive. Occasional skirmishes took place, but no encounter of any moment had yet occurred.

The twelfth moon from the date of the lady's widowhood was waning. She sate in her melancholy chamber in the tower, while her silent attendant, Una, applied herself to some feminine occupation with the needle or distaff. The torch flared upon the rude tapestry of the walls, and showed them everywhere covered with some memorials of the honoured dead. There hung his arms, and there his hunting implements. The guitar he would touch so skilfully at evening, was suspended unstrung and unregarded from the antler of a stag, whom he had killed with his own hand at bay. Many a relic of the departed knight was there to recall his memory; but one object more painfully effected it — a babe was sleeping in a cradle, which the widow's eyes from time to time would dwell on for a moment, and as speedily avoid, lest the woman should gain the mastery, and elicit feelings that stern resolution would hush for ever. A slight tap upon the outer door brought Una to demand the cause. It was the warder, to say that a solitary man had been landed beneath the rocks eastward of the tower, and that the boat had instantly put off to sea, while the stranger was approaching the castle.

The interval was short before another attendant presented a sealed packet to his lady. It was unclosed, and contained an earnest wish that the writer should be favoured with an interview, as he had much of deep and secret import to communicate. With that fearless spirit for which the daughter of Cormac Dhu was so remarkable, she directed the stranger to

be introduced to the outer chamber; and having ordered the apartment to be lighted, she there awaited his coming.

The late visiter was a low-sized man, wrapped in a pilgrim's cloak. He closed the door behind him carefully, and demanded, pointing to Una, whether the presence of a witness could not be dispensed with?

"What may your errand be that would entitle you to a secret conference with the daughter of Cormac Dhu? She rarely parlies with unknown visiters."

"Dost thou apprehend danger or fraud?" said the stranger.

"Neither," said the lady, haughtily. "While we converse, this board divides us; and on the first sign of treason, I should lodge a bullet in your heart;" and she displaced her robe, and pointed to a pistol in her girdle. "Thou wert disarmed in the guard-room; the warden waits without; the iron grate upon the stair is fastened;—I fear, therefore, little from violence, and treachery only ensures a halter."

"All this I knew, lady, before I ventured hither; and now grant me but a brief hearing, and I will tell thee news that, if thy fancy be not changed of late, will glad thee more than seeing one of thy husband's murderers on the gibbet."

"Say'st thou, fellow? By our Lady! you promise much. Go, Una. Leave me with this man alone. Nay, go, wench—close the door. Were he a Red Macmahon, I defy him."

"And were he one, lady?"—asked the stranger, as her attendant closed the door.

"This pistol, which while our interview continues shall never leave my hand, in that event would rid me of an enemy."

"Nay, lady, that would mar your own purpose. I am a Macmahon, and yet I come to give thee nobler vengeance than human ear has heard, or human hand has executed."

"Thou a Macmahon—and in this castle?"

"Yes—for where, but from the widow of De Lacy, could John Macmahon gain the revenge he seeks.—Nay, lady, thy weapon is unnecessary. Hear but the story of my wrongs, and thine own, proud dame, are not superior."

"Who art thou, fellow?—art thou a follower of the murderer?"

"I am his kinsman."

"What brings thee hither, where death is certain?"

"Vengeance!"

"On whom?"

"Red Connell."

"What are thy wrongs?—how has the Red Chief incurred thy hatred?"

"Listen—the tale is short. I was the playmate of his youth, the companion of his manhood. When but a dependant on his brother's bounty, I assisted him in all his schemes. My purse and sword were at his disposal, and I have foregone my own pleasures and interests to forward his. I loved a woman passionately, and he knew it. There were obstacles in my path to happiness. He swore, that if he outlived his brother, he would smooth away the difficulties between me and my love, and that he would obtain for me Kathleen O'Donnell. His brother died; the time to perform his promise came; and, while I went on a secret message from him to De Burgo, he pledged his faith that on my return the loved one should be mine. I met the earl unexpectedly, for he had in secret journeyed into Tyrawley on important business; and again I was at Doona before it could be believed that I could have reached Portumna. I came to claim my mistress—and I found that Connell had used his advantages of rank, and influence, and fortune, to render Kathleen valueless—to rob me of the woman I idolized, and make me a reproach and bye-word among men.

He did not dream that I could so soon discover his perfidy and her dishonour; for accident put me in possession of circumstances which he vainly hoped that time only could betray. I have been villanously and wantonly disgraced; and I have sworn to take deadly vengeance for the injury. I masked my purpose well. In Doona they suppose me journeying again on a bootless errand to Portumna: but I am here, and, if thou wouldst avenge a husband's blood, and crush thine enemies in one brave swoop, so that none shall live to tell the tale, I can, lady, give thee the means, and place them in thy power."

"Thy words are pleasant, stranger. The means?—I long to hear them."

"What shall be my reward? My demands shall be but humble;—a safe convoy to Galway, eternal secrecy, and a purse of gold to carry me to the northern wars."

"All this I promise—but who shall answer for thy faith?"

"My wrongs! Lady, thou lovedst, report says, ardently, and lost thy love by treason. What wouldst thou give for vengeance? Can I not then, hate like thee?"

"Enough—proceed—the means of vengeance," said the lady, with impatience.

"Attend.—Three days hence the festival of Connell's patron saint comes round. He was not long since on the grave's verge with sickness; and, in his mortal extremity, confessed other crimes besides the murder of thy lord; and, on promise of contrition, and a penitential undertaking, in event of recovery, the prior shrived him. Hearken to his vow;—it is, on the anniversary of De Lacy's death, to repair, with the companions of his crime, to Cahir, and in that holy island to fast the while, and spend the hours in prayer and penance. Thou knowest the fatal day. If thine enemies escape, thou art not of the stubborn metal that thy reception of Connell's messenger would argue."

"And on the third day hence they will visit Cahir on a pilgrimage?"

"'T is so prepared. Fearful of discovery, as they must pass this island, they will leave Doona at midnight, and pass this tower ere morning breaks."

"'T is well." She touched a signal wire unperceived, and instantly an armed man presented himself. "Ulic," she said, as she addressed her foster-brother, "see this stranger lodged in safe keeping. Let him have all he wants, but no communication with friend or foe. Tell Duncan of the Key, his head shall answer for the stranger's safety. And now hear me, man of accursed name!—If thy story be true—thy intent honest—thy safety shall be certain, and fifty rose-nobles thy guerdon; but if treachery or falsehood lurk beneath thy tale, by the Queen of Heaven! the moment thy perfidy appears, thou shalt dangle from the highest pinnacle of this tower, and feed the ravens while skin or bone adhere together. Ulic, return—I want thee instantly."

"I have told thee naught but truth," said the captive, as he was led to the dungeon. "The game will be a-foot—if the quarry escape, thine will be the fault, not mine."

The lady watched him till the door closed.—"The man seems honest in his villany; and if Red Connell robbed him of his love, who shall blame him if he takes brave vengeance? He fears the prey will foil me—No! Connell, hold but thy course to Cahir, and thou or I will be cold enough before the sun sinks thrice beneath the wave!" She said, and paced the chamber till her foster-brother stood before her. To him she issued secret orders, to collect a chosen band next evening at sunset; and having directed such other preparations to be made as were necessary for the attempt, she retired to her own chamber, to arrange, in secret, the plan and conduct of the enterprise.

That she pondered deeply on the attempt was certain; for the third hour past midnight came, before the tall shadow of the lady ceased to cross the iron lattice of the tower.

CHAPTER IX.

In the castle of Clare Island, the day preceding the anniversary of the death of Hubert de Lacy was unmarked by any particular incident. The lady confined herself closely to her chamber; Cormac Dhu sate in his customary state in the great hall, listening to the romances of his ancient harper, or talking of scenes of warfare and the chase, in which himself had borne a prominent part; the islanders were employed in their general vocation, making or mending nets, arranging fishing-lines, or repairing the rigging of their hookers; in the guard-room, it "was idlesse all;" and the military retainers passed the hours of their watch and ward in converse, sleep, or the rude games which dissipated time before cards and dice were yet in common use; the few boats which had been taking rock-fish, or lifting spillets off the shore, returned one by one to the harbour; and a solitary sailing vessel, which had been observed at day-break to anchor off the island, and remain stationary and unoccupied since then, now hoisted sail, and stood out to sea to the northward, evidently, from her course, intending to double Achil Head.

But quiet and unvarying as matters seemed in the castle of Clare Island, silent but steady preparation was making for a daring enterprise. Weapons and fire-arms were carefully got ready; and, when the strange sail had vanished round the northern headland of the bay, the fastest and stoutest galley was launched, and apparelled and provisioned for an absence of some time. The destination was stated to be Sligo, and the crew were warned to be ready to depart at midnight.

The tenth hour came, and Cormac Dhu retired to his chamber for the night. Gradually the castle and its out-buildings were wrapped in repose, and none but the warders were awake. Another hour was proclaimed from the battlements; and, issuing from a private postern, the Lady Grace, alone and unattended, took the path among the cliffs that led to the deserted chapel.

A feeble gleam of light shot from the narrow casements of the building, and a deep and earnest whispering within showed that the edifice was tenanted. Entering through a door that once connected the sacristy with the altar, the daughter of Cormac Dhu stood before the sanctuary; and while a murmur of respectful welcome announced her appearance among the clansmen, she briefly but eloquently stated the secret reasons of her issuing orders for their assembling.

When the intended pilgrimage of their mortal enemies to Cahir was communicated, and the scheme of vengeance unfolded, a stern but smothered buzz of approbation followed. Their hereditary foes, the secret murderers of their brave chief and his unsuspecting followers, were soon to be within their power; and the moment of retribution, for which they had so long sighed, was near. In a wild and barbarous people, revenge is virtue: no wonder they mutually excited the sanguinary principle of exacting blood for blood, and plighted their oaths upon the ruined altar, to extend no mercy to the Red Macmahons.

The moon was scarcely visible, and in the gloom of midnight, the armed galley left the harbour of Clare Island. The breeze was light and favourable, and as the distance was but four leagues, the dim outline of Cahir rose

over the ocean, and showed duskily in the feeble light. Although the landing-place was on the other side, the O'Malleys steered to the eastward of the island, and, heaving the galley to, they disembarked by means of a small skiff in a secret fissure of the rock, until fifty armed men were landed. According to previous orders, when the last of the clan had left the vessel, the crew eased away the sheets, and, with a fair wind, stood due south, and running into the Killeries, anchored under shelter of the heights, which, rising precipitously from the water's edge, landlock that singular inlet.

The first care of the band was to conceal the skiff by which they effected their landing. This, from the numerous caverns which the eternal action of the waters of the Atlantic had worn on the face of the rock, was easily effected. Many of these fissures were known to the O'Malleys, who at different periods had used them as places of concealment; in one of these the skiff was deposited, and a secret council of the leaders was then held to determine their future proceedings.

The island of Cahir is a barren rock, in circumference about an English mile. It is uninhabited now, but at that time was celebrated for its chapel and cross, as well as a spacious cemetery, in which the adjacent islanders, besides several of the mainland families, when the weather would permit, always interred their dead. There had formerly been a small monastic establishment on the island, but the difficulty with which the rock was approached or quitted in the winter, had induced the holy community to prefer a residence upon *terra firma*, where the place, if not so sacred, was infinitely more accessible. Consequent on the desertion of the brotherhood, the edifice fell to decay: it was now only used as a burying-ground or place for penance. A solitary friar — a moody melancholy man — was the sole occupant of Cahir; and, save in summer, when a few sheep were sent from the other islands to be pastured on the short herbage which grew in the fissures of the rock, or pilgrims and fishermen occasionally landed for penance or fresh water, Cahir was totally deserted, and left to the care of the gloomy ascetic, who for months, when the weather had been tempestuous, lived upon this barren speck amid the ocean, without hearing a sound but the screaming of the sea-birds and the howling of the storm.

To secure the monk was the first step — the next, to conceal the armed band until the Macmahons had landed and commenced their act of penance. Guided by a clansman who knew the island perfectly, the lady and her followers ascended to the surface of the rock, and, lighted by the moon, stood before the low door which conducted through the ruined chancel to the cell occupied by the solitary churchman.

Having struck a spark, a torch was lighted, and the party approached the humble resting-place of the ascetic. Disturbed by the tread of many feet, the old man, with terror and surprise, perceived his couch of dried sea-weed surrounded by a group of strange and ferocious-looking men. Mustering resolution, he demanded the purpose of their untimely coming. An order to be silent, and an assurance that no evil was intended, was the sole reply, and he was directed to rise and accompany two armed men, in whose custody it was intimated he must remain. Resistance would be useless. The monk obeyed — and, led by his captors, was placed in one of the numerous caverns with which the island abounds.

There was now no human being to observe or interrupt their plans. Availing themselves of their local acquaintance with the rock, the band divided, and a part ambushed in a cliff that commanded the place of penance; while a chosen few couched in a cave, not distant from the landing-place, waiting, if necessary, to cut off all retreat, when their victims had once disembarked. The Lady Grace, on a more distant part of the island, with a few attendants, was concealed effectually; while, from her hiding

place, an uninterrupted prospect of the ocean was commanded, and thus the approach of the doomed band would, from the time they doubled Achil Head be visible.

Long before morning dawned every disposition was complete, and many an anxious eye was turned to the north, to watch the distant horizon. The mist rose slowly from the ocean, but not a sail was visible. The sun flung his beams across the sea, and the blue waters were still unbroken by aught but the play of water-fowls. An hour of intense anxiety wore on. Had the tale of the alleged traitor been a fable, or had the Red Macmahon feared to perform his religious vow? While doubts harassed the hidden band, a speck darkened the distant ocean; presently a larger object crossed the sunshine; sails rose fast above the water; and in a short time a galley was clearly seen, bearing up with a free wind for the island, which she must reach within an hour.

It was indeed the devoted band that bore away for Cahir. Confident in the secrecy of their intended pilgrimage, they swept past the island, where they believed their deadly enemies were engaged in their accustomed avocations, and ignorant that their foes were on the sea. The bark they had caused to watch the preceding day off the castle of Cormac Dhu, had met them with the intelligence that all within the island was quiet, and that the galleys were hauled upon the beach for shelter, or repairs. No wonder the Macmahons considered that their voyage to Cahir was unsuspected; and without a single fear they came swiftly towards the landing-place. Not a sail was on the sea; not a living thing appeared upon the rock; they lowered their canvass, dropped anchor, and in a few minutes their skiff was rowing merrily to the shore, laden with the chieftain and his fellow-penitents. Again the boat returned to the galley, and the remainder of the company quitted the vessel for the rock.

While the Red Leader and his followers were debarking, a feeling of intense agony appeared to agitate the widow of De Lacy. Until she saw them fairly on the rock, she dreaded lest some unexpected occurrence might alarm them; and her victims, even yet, escape the toils. But there was no cause to apprehend discovery. Her plans were coolly and effectually arranged, and the chief and his followers, having hauled the skiff upon the beach, followed the path over the loose stones which led to the ruins and the cross.

There was not a sound heard upon that deserted islet, but the steps of the Macmahons, as they fell on the rock-worn footway. Before the rude cross of stone they threw aside their belts, and, placing their weapons in a heap, prepared for the promised act of penitential devotion. Sixteen of the Red clan were already kneeling before the altar, when suddenly a stream of fire issued from the cliff, and, rushing from their concealment in the ruins and among the adjacent rocks, their fierce and implacable assailants hemmed them in on every side; and before the wretched victims could gain their weapons, or form for mutual defence, not a man remained unhurt but Connell. No quarter was asked or given; the wounded were despatched with unsparing cruelty; and, save the chief, who had been secured, by the especial command of the widow of De Lacy, of a score who left the bark, in a brief space not one remained alive.

Bound with a sword-belt, and almost stupified by the sudden and desperate slaughter of his followers, Connell Macmahon kept his eyes bent upon the ground.—He had no chance of escape or hope of mercy—he knew the ruthless hands that held him, and, conscious of his own foul deed, he could expect no pity from his enemies. If his glance left the earth for a moment, it rested on the corpses of his companions, or met the fierce and unrelenting looks of the O'Malleys, who surrounded him. His heart dies within him, and when a slight movement among his guards roused his at-

tention, and a deep peculiar voice commanded him to look up, his countenance blanched as if a spectre blasted him, for before him stood the widow of his victim — the wife of the murdered Englishman, Hubert de Lacy.

With a desperate exertion, the doomed chief endeavoured to summon resolution for the event he knew to be inevitable, and when the daughter of Cormac Dhu, seated on a loose stone, commanded the culprit to be placed before her, Red Connell advanced with tolerable composure.

"Dost thou recollect me," was the first question that the stern dame directed to her devoted prisoner.

"I am before the Lady of Clare Island," was the dogged reply.

"Even so — her whom thou mad'st a widow. At this blessed hour, but twelvemonths past, I was a happy wife, and my unborn babe could boast, in the person of a gallant gentleman, a living father. — Where wert thou, Red Macmathon, on the anniversary of this hapless day? — Does thy memory fail, and shall Grace O'Malley jog it? — Still silent? — then hear me — I will but feign a tale — Fancy to thyself a wild and mountain glen — a knight and his few followers basely trepanned, surprised, taken at false vantage, and overdone by numbers. Still though oppressed, the noble youth fought gallantly; at last a felon-shot stretched him on the earth, and his recreant assassin placed his coward foot upon his prostrate rival. He scowled on the dying knight — 'Was not my bullet, in this wild glen, young Sasenach, truer than thine among the moonlit rocks of yonder island? Her who slighted me for thee, thou shalt never see again; — and, mark me! ere a year rolls over, Connell Macmahon shall share that proud one's bed, or he shall sleep as lowly as thyself, my fallen enemy!' — And thou didst strive to keep thy promise, as yonder shorn wretch" — and she spurned a corpse with her foot, whose mutilated head proclaimed him the Macmahons' envoy, when Connell sent his last insulting message — "proved to his cost. — Yet thou shalt keep thy promise, and sleep, if the sea be deeper than the shrine of our Lady of Grace, lowlier than thy fallen enemy. He died upon his bed — a bosom that loved but him, and ne'er shall love another, pillowed his drooping head. These lips received his parting sigh. Five hundred clansmen stood around his bier. Masses were sung, and naught that could honour his gallant corpse was forgotten. What will his murderer's fate be? Look, Connell Macmahon, seest thou the halter swinging from yon ruined window? There read thy doom — thine shall be a felon's death — thine shall be a felon's grave!"

She waved her hand — without a moment's respite, the wretched murderer was placed beneath the ruins. The fatal cord was bound about his neck, and, in a few minutes, Connell Macmahon was a dead man.

While the deed of death was transacting, the Lady Grace issued her command for the removal of the bodies, and they were accordingly borne to the landing place, and committed to the deep. The skiff that transported them when living from the galley, was now employed to convey their corpses to an ocean grave. Last of the band, the chief, when life was extinct, was rowed from the shore, the murderer's body sank in the deep sea, and the last chief of the Macmahons perished, the victim of a woman.

Every means were used to remove the sanguinary traces of the late slaughter; but evident tokens remained upon the rocks, that told too plainly that a scene of blood had there been recently transacted. One difficulty occurred, and that was the disposal of the monk. Although he had not witnessed the morning's desperate deed, shots and the clash of weapons must have betrayed to him that some violence was done. To do injury to the guiltless monk was never contemplated by the fiercest of the clan; and yet to leave him on the rock would be, for many reasons, objectionable. Accordingly, it was determined that the ascetic should be conveyed to Clare

Island; and there was little reason to doubt that he would speedily become reconciled to his change of residence.

Obedient to a concerted signal, the galley at twilight left the Killeries, where she had remained at anchor, and bore up for the landing-place of Cahir. The Lady Grace, with her military retainers and the astonished monk, were speedily embarked. Taking the vessel that had borne the Macmahons to their fate in tow, the galley stood out to sea, to gain an offing from the land; the bark was next scuttled, and being deeply ballasted with stones, she soon filled rapidly. When nearly sinking, a match was applied to the sails and rigging, which, being coated with tar and grease, instantly caught fire, and blazed furiously. She was then abandoned, and, in less than a quarter of an hour, the scathed hull sunk in the depths of ocean, and was hidden by the same waves that rippled over the mangled corpses of her crew.

While the galley of Clare Island stood out from the blazing wreck, the Lady watched the progress of its destruction; but when the waters filled the hull, and the flames suddenly disappeared, the daughter of Cormac Dhu proudly raised her head, and muttered, as her dark eye lightened, and her brow flushed, "De Lacy, thou art nobly avenged at last!"

At midnight, the armed band and their aged prisoner quietly debarked; the galley, ere morning broke, was hauled upon the beach, and no sign that anything extraordinary had recently occupied the O'Malleys was to be observed. The only domestic event which caused attention was, that the orphan daughter of De Lacy was baptized, with due formalities, and that the lady of Clare Island herself underwent a long and rigid course of penance — but none knew, and none asked, wherefore.

CHAPTER X.

From the close of the last chapter, for a period of twenty years that followed, the private history of the Lady of Clare Island was intimately connected with the political events of the times. The death of Connell Macmahon produced the ruin of the sept. As neither of the brothers had been married, the course of succession fell upon the orphan children of their deceased sister, who, still but infants, were resident in Doona. But, in those days of violence, the rights of orphanage were easily disputed; and two pretenders to the chieftainship of the clan appeared in the illegitimate sons of the departed brothers. Both had their supporters, while none defended the invasion upon the properties of the deserted children. Between the rivals, a fierce and protracted struggle resulted; and while one seized upon the castle of Doona, the other established himself in the wild peninsula of Enis, and both for years maintained a harassing sort of petty warfare, with variable success, till, eventually, a common enemy stepped in, and crushed them. Cormac Dhu had long since been gathered to his fathers; and Grace O'Malley, eschewing a second alliance, and turning her sole attention to the aggrandizement of her clan, insensibly obtained a fresh accession of power upon the ruins of the rival sept, until, with the exception of Doona, every strong-hold upon the coast, for forty leagues, was either in her own possession, or held under her, in feudal tenure, by some of her own sept.

In the mean time the kingdom had been frequently and seriously disturbed. Although Munster and the north were the principal places where rebellion had appeared, Connaught had not been suffered to remain quiescent. Thomond's attempt in 1570, though rendered in a great measure abortive

by its premature explosion, committed a number of the western clans with the English, who paid the penalties of rebellion in outlawries and confiscations.

But the Lady of Clare Island fortunately contrived not only to avoid engaging in the insurrection, but obtained the reputation of being well-affected to the government of Elizabeth, a character she managed to support indifferently well during the remainder of that reign. To divide the Irish, was ever the favourite policy of England; hence the adherence of the Lady Grace was duly appreciated by the able Deputy of Connaught. Nor did she fail to turn her loyalty to good account. Any symptom of disaffection to English authority was quite a satisfactory plea for the removal of a troublesome neighbour, or one who in time might so become; and, on the high seas, her armed galleys scrupulously examined all suspicious vessels, lest they might in any way be connected with the enemies of the queen of England. A court of admiralty was then unknown, and as the Lady Grace performed the double duty of advocate and judge, condemnations occasionally took place that would scarcely be satisfactory to modern jurisconsults. These gave rise to rumours among her enemies that the Dark Lady was, in her appropriation of property, rather lax, and in nautical affairs but little better than a bucanier. Indeed, some of her exploits were tortured into direct accusations of piracy; but the virgin queen placed naturally a favourable construction on the acts of a well-disposed subject, who had exhibited undoubted loyalty, in removing several enemies of the state, and demolishing sundry of the Armada, when driven upon the north-west coast by stress of weather. Certain it is, that neither galleys nor crews ever revisited their native Spain; and, while the queen's enemies decreased, the effects of the Lady of Clare Island received a marvellous augmentation.

But while the fearless and enterprising spirit of the widow of De Lacy established the superiority of her family power over that of every rival on the western shores, it seemed fated that in her domestic relations she should always be unfortunate. Her orphan daughter grew up, and, possessing all the gentleness and beauty of her father, merited and received a greater share of tender attention than might be expected from the wild and masculine disposition of her lady mother. Anxious that the race of the O'Malleys should not perish, at womanhood the daughter of De Lacy was wedded to a younger brother of Ulic de Burgo, Earl of Clanricarde. A match formed under such favourable auspices promised to be as felicitous as politic. A powerful family were united to her own sept; and if anything was wanted to add stability to her acquired rights, this might be expected from a union of her interests with the more settled fortunes of the De Burgos. But such was not to be the case, and any advantages from the connexion were transitory. Her son-in-law in a trifling skirmish on the boundaries of Connaught received his death-wound; and his wife outlived the birth of a daughter but a few days. These were indeed heavy visitations, and threatened to render nugatory all the exertions of her restless and perilous life. The loss of De Burgo and his consort were additionally imbittered by the circumstance, that the infant who survived them was a female. Had a boy been born, the lady could have looked, though remotely, to a continuation of her family, with a fair hope. But what could be anticipated from a helpless female, when in these unsettled times the bravest could scarcely maintain their rights, and secure a succession for their children. Chagrined at this event, she felt but little interest in watching the infancy of her granddaughter; and, while still a child, transferred the double duty of her education and nurture to the superior of a religious house in Italy, who chanced to be a member of the family of De Burgo. Under the protection of this relative the orphan continued for twelve years, her grandame expressing an interest in her well-being, rather from the magnificence of her presents to

the community, than the more tender and feminine demonstrations which indicate maternal regard. Thus things had continued, till, to the surprise of all, and the alarm and regret of the young heiress in particular, a galley arrived to restore her to her grandame's protection, from the quieter charge of the holy prioress of the Ursulines. She embarked accordingly, and, after a short and prosperous voyage, landed on the territories which, in course of descent, were yet to become her own. The return of Inez de Burgo had occurred about six months previous to the opening of this story.

An event, however, which took place several years antecedent, formed a striking era in the history of the Dark Lady. For years she had watched the family feuds of her hereditary enemies the Macmahons, with a silent but sleepless vigilance. Shorn of their power, and curtailed of their best possessions, the sept were still formidable in numbers, and retained a position in the neighbourhood, notwithstanding the ceaseless persecution of the O'Malleys, which kept alive the jealousy and fears of their bitter and implacable foe, the Lady of Clare Island. The son of Connell Macmahon held the Castle of Doona; and, from its local position and acknowledged strength, the occupant of necessity commanded Blacksod Bay, the northern entrance of Achil Sound, and the large and wild district which lies within the Mullet. To gain this important stronghold had for years engrossed the thoughts of the restless enemy of the possessor. To any open attempt, the strength and situation of the place opposed insuperable obstacles; and, as the persecution the "Red Family" had suffered had already reached the ears of the Lord Deputy, and excited on his part both sympathy and attention, the Dark Lady dreaded to employ either secret treachery or open violence, lest her farther aggressions should rouse the indignation of Sir Richard Bingham,* who, with singular moderation for those times, endeavoured to succour the defenceless, and suppress the outrages which had hitherto been perpetrated by the native chieftains with impunity. But while thus checked by the apprehension of incurring the displeasure of the English governor, a political event gave her the pretext she had long waited for, and annihilated the remaining power of the rival family, who had so long been a source of unmitigated jealousy and hatred.

Tyrone, celebrated in Irish story, was a man as notorious for perfidy and cruelty, as he was politic, enterprising, and courageous. Although elevated to the dignity of an earldom by the favour of the English queen, he appears to have been always disaffected to her government, and ambitious of obtaining the sovereignty of Ulster. Raising himself to the head of the O'Neals, by the murder of his own cousin, he preferred the pride of barbarous license and dominion to the pleasures of opulence and tranquillity. His hatred to the conquerors of his country appears to have been boundless; and it is asserted that he actually put some of his own followers to death merely for introducing beards, in imitation of their English neighbours. Proud, sanguinary, and unrelenting, his great abilities in war and politics were singularly contrasted with private habits of the lowest sensuality. A contemner of the elegances of life, his sole pleasure was found in the coarsest debaucheries; and it is affirmed that, to allay the fever produced by constant intemperance, he would wallow in the mire to remove the effects his drunken excesses had occasioned. To embarrass the government and distract the attention of the queen's lieutenant, he artfully fomented the discontent of the native chiefs, and incited the Maguires, O'Rourks, O'Donnells and Macmahons, with their numerous followers, to break into rebellion; and, encouraged by the Catholic clergy, and supported

* The rebellion of the O'Rourks followed a few years after; occasioned by the strict and equitable administration of Sir Richard Bingham, Governor of Connaught, who endeavoured to repress the tyranny of the chieftains over their vassals.—*Lodge*, p. 574.

by Spanish influence abroad, he trusted to overturn the English authority and establish a sovereignty for himself.

Insensible to every honourable feeling, the treachery and artifice of Tyrone enabled him for years, under various fortunes, to maintain his position. Sir William Russell was foiled by the superior cunning of the rebel lord. Sir John Norris, harassed by O'Neal, and defeated in every attempt to reduce him to submission, is said to have considered his former reputation tarnished by his want of success, and to have sickened and died from disappointment. But Sir Henry Bagnal, who succeeded him in the Irish command, was still more unfortunate. In an attempt to relieve the Fort of Blackwater, then closely besieged by the rebel forces, he was attacked in an unfavourable position; and an accidental explosion of a powder-wagon having increased the panic occasioned by this unexpected onslaught, he was completely defeated and driven from the field; and, although relieved by the advance of a body of horse, who, under the command of Montacute, succeeded in extricating the English infantry, the retreat was not effected without considerable slaughter, as the luckless general and fifteen hundred men fell on the occasion.

This decided advantage, amounting to a victory, not only increased the confidence of the rebels, but supplied them largely with arms and ammunition, with which they were before but indifferently provided. Numbers daily joined Tyrone; the rebellion assumed so formidable an appearance, that the Earl of Essex was specially sent from England to suppress the insurrection, with extraordinary powers from the queen, as her lieutenant, and a well-appointed army of more than twenty thousand men.

Of the failure of this nobleman to achieve the objects of his mission, and his subsequent disgrace with his royal mistress, the history of the times affords a melancholy record. It is sufficient for the purposes of this tale, merely to state that his abler successor, Mountjoy, after a long and doubtful contest, completely effected the subjugation of the disaffected, and the final overthrow of Tyrone, who, reduced to the greatest misery, at length threw himself on the commiseration of the Lord Deputy, and obtained a promise of his intercession for mercy from the queen, on the terms of an absolute surrender of his fortune. But the time had passed when the discomfiture of her arch-enemy could give pleasure to the broken-hearted monarch. The hand of death was already hard upon Elizabeth. The untimely fate of her beloved favourite haunted her continually, and the brilliant victory of Mountjoy could not recall her thoughts from the scaffold where Essex prematurely perished.

The opening of O'Neal's rebellion had given the Lady of Clare Island the only pretext she required for the final destruction of her weakened foes. The chief of the Macmahons fell readily into the plans of the ambitious O'Neal; and, under the promise of a recovery of his lost rights, the restoration of his family, and an acknowledgment of his disputed claims, he threw off the English yoke, and, uniting with others of the western chiefs, declared Tyrone King of Munster. Urged by an unaccountable fatality, he joined some other bands, to carry succour into Ulster; and, leaving his castle of Doona but feebly garrisoned, marched northward with the best of his retainers, and fell in an inglorious affray with some skirmishers attached to the army of Sir John Norris.

The disaffection of the western chiefs was speedily communicated to the English lieutenant, and the governor of Connaught had especial orders to use effective measures to encourage the royalists, and punish the refractory. The Lady of Clare Island saw that this was the crisis of the Macmahon's fate.

With amazing secrecy and expedition, she collected every disposable force she could command, and favoured by accidental advantages of weather,

effected, without suspicion, a landing near the castle, and, by a prompt and fortunate assault, the fortress that for thirty years had bade defiance both to open violence and secret treachery, fell in an unguarded moment.

Under the military license of the times, the garrison, though offering but a feeble defence, was put indiscriminately to the sword, and, with but two exceptions, all that survived the storm, were a fool, a monk, and a minstrel.

Aware of the advantages the local situation of the castle of Doona possessed over that of Clare Island, the Dark Lady transferred her military establishment thither; and while the tower on the island was regularly maintained, Doona formed her principal garrison. High in favour with Essex, and equally fortunate in the friendship of his successor, the Lady Grace might pride herself on the good fortune which attended her bold and perilous career; and, probably, the anxiety of handing down her family and acquired properties induced her to recall her grandchild, at a period when the convulsions of the kingdom would occupy an active spirit like hers in the acquisition of political power rather than in private attention to her hitherto neglected charge.

To account for the extraordinary success that uniformly attended the Dark Lady of Doona, a superstitious age, rather than resolve it to its true cause, preferred ascribing it to some unhallowed agency. Hence it was universally believed that the chief of the O'Malleys "had learned the art that none may know," and through it obtained supernatural assistance. The stern and gloomy character which early disappointment had first produced, was fostered by familiarity with scenes of violence and bloodshed; and tinctured deeply with the then prevalent belief in spells and magic, the Lady Grace reposed much faith in necromancy. Perhaps, too, she was not unwilling to encourage an opinion which invested her with superhuman power, and rendered her more formidable to the uncivilized clan over whom she exercised her despotic sway. Hence, at times, she preserved a dark mysterious bearing, even to those who enjoyed her confidence most largely. She would retire for days from her attendants, and, in the privacy of an apartment, into which none were permitted to enter uninvited, she spent many solitary hours. Whether forbidden rites, or political intrigue, engrossed those mysterious vigils, none could determine, and few ventured to inquire.

CHAPTER XI.

We left the strangers, with their new attendant, in undisturbed possession of the lower chamber of the tower of Doona, enjoying the gratifying repose that a couch on shore confers on those who, cooped within the narrow limits of a ship's cabin, have tossed for days upon the ocean. Without the weariness of a long voyage, to make their pillow additionally welcome, the evening's carouse would have ensured them unbroken sleep; and save their new esquire, whom secret and melancholy recollections kept awake, worldly cares and sorrows were banished for a time from the vaulted apartment in which the belated youths were sleeping.

But besides Hubert, there were others in that silent tower, upon whose lids the gentle god had not as yet descended. In her private chamber the Dark Lady was seated in the high-backed chair, her eyes bent upon the fading embers of the wood-fire, and her thoughts occupied in deep and momentous meditations. The neglected lamp yielded a yellow and unsteady flame; and as its sickly light glanced on the dark arras and oaken wainscot of the chamber, in the stern personage who filled the antique chair a timid fancy

might readily imagine some cast-away from heaven, framing unholy spells, or pondering in midnight solitude on forbidden mysteries.

But, in the topmost story of the building, a scene of a different character was presented. The apartment was tolerably well lighted, and showed that the furniture was not only rare and costly, but arranged with considerable taste. Instead of dark panels and dusky tapestry, the walls were covered with paintings by foreign masters, hung round with instruments of music, and interspersed with divers curious matters, brought from the remotest Indies, and places beyond the seas. The various articles of furniture were elaborately carved, and formed of hard and polished woods, evidently not the produce of the land. Silver candlesticks, richly embossed, supported the waxen tapers which lighted the chamber, and emitted a grateful perfume; and beneath a sconce of the same metal, a little altar was seen, within a deep recess, surmounted by a cabinet painting of the crucifixion, and supplied with an illuminated missal and costly rosary. The elegance and materials of the toilet bespoke the occupants to be females, whose sleeping-chamber it appeared to be, from small couches, with silken coverings, being placed in compartments in the walls. The last and newest piece of luxury, for these times, this singular apartment boasted, was a thick and embroidered carpet of Turkish workmanship, which extended fairly across the floor, and hid the oaken planks from view. Rich as all this garniture was, there was much elegance evidenced in its disposition, while the appearance of the inmates themselves formed a greater contrast to the other inhabitants of the rude building, than this luxurious apartment exhibited to the gloomy and ill-arranged vaults beneath.

It would appear that the occupants of the room we have described were preparing to retire for the night. One was a young and lovely woman, who, seated before a sumptuous mirror, had already partially undressed, while a very handsome boy arranged her hair, which, escaping from the ribband that had restrained it, fell in luxuriant curls over a neck and bosom as white and pure as the marble of Paros. In her very beautiful features, a trace of recent grief was visible; and, as she took from the table a small miniature, a sigh escaped, and after gazing on it for a moment, a tear stole down her cheek, and dropped upon the crystal of the picture. The boy, who had hitherto observed her sorrow with apparent interest, gently passed his arm round her neck, and placing his lips to those of the fair mourner, kissed them affectionately.

"Inez," he said, "thy grief makes me miserable; I would have been with thee much sooner, but the Ban Oussel Dhu delayed me in that gloomy room beneath. I longed to tell thee of the gallant strangers, who came at nightfall to the castle; but the lady, full of some dark project, kept muttering and pacing through her chamber; and then thy own sad interview with her, — but cheer up. This Red-hand is not yet arrived; and it may yet please heaven to succour us, and turn the stern dame from her present purpose."

"Alas! dear Florence, it is but a desperate hope we cling to — wed him, I never will; — the lowest dungeon in this castle, before his detested bed, for Inez; — a traitor, a murderer, a brutal voluptuary. — Ah, hadst thou known him whom I love — him to whom heart and hand are plighted!"

"Dear lady, thy own gallant appeared this very night before my imagination, every time I served the board or filled the goblet for the stranger. His face was like that portrait; his form such as thou hast painted his. — Would thou hadst seen him, and that thy fearful grand-dame had not sent thee from the hall."

"Is he of goodly presence?" asked the lady with indifference.

"Of right noble," said the boy; "as he entered the chamber of state, lofty as the doorway is, his white plume swept it; and when he doffed his cap, and stood before the Ban Oussel, I never saw a statelier gallant. His

soft, but sparkling eye, his raven hair, his thin moustache, and winning smile, proclaimed him a gentleman, and neither polished rapier nor knightly spurs were requisite to announce his nobility. But when he spoke — when in soft and well-turned courtesy, he thanked the Dark Lady for her welcome, every word thrilled through my very bosom, and I thought of the nameless gallant who scaled the convent walls at midnight, to sing beneath the casement of the pretty boarder, and swear to her, when she affected to awake, how fond and honourable was his love."

"Stop, dear Florence, thou but openest the wound anew, when these minutes of past happiness are recalled. — Well, and how seemed the knight's companion?"

"He looked," said the boy, "a fitting mate to share the fortunes of such a gallant comrade. Less by half the head, his air and bearing were gentle, free, and soldierly. At times, upon his comrade's brow, I marked a trace of care, and more than once, a sigh escaped him, called up by some unhappy recollection; but his friend appeared like one on whom the world would frown in vain, whose merry eye fortune herself could never dim, and who, with bold heart and ready hand, would win his road or perish. Often his fixed gaze made me turn aside, and more than once, I thought that neither dumbness nor disguise concealed my sex from his suspicion."

"Was there not a third?" inquired the fair girl.

"There was — and how shall I describe him? Less than either of his masters, his countenance was of that extraordinary character which made it difficult to decide, whether in his subordinate rank he held the due place that birth and lineage had designed him for. He bore himself respectfully when addressed by either of the knights; but at times, as he did the offices of attendant at the board, there was a newness in his style of service, that would insinuate he was unpractised in the task, and that the hand which filled the wine-cup would better rein a steed or wield a brand. At whiles he eyed the Ban Durragha with searching side-looks that were unfriendly and suspicious, but as I remarked, he ever evaded her scrutiny. But the strangest portion of the tale is yet untold. When all had retired but the strangers, I, by the lady's orders, entered the room with wine — I had signed for and obtained permission to depart, when, springing from his seat, he seized my arm as I passed him, gazed on me with a look that seemed to penetrate my soul; then letting his hold loose, staggered to a chair, like one overwhelmed with some strange and terrible discovery; I dreaded farther consequences, and left the chamber, but, through the door, which was not closed, observed that his masters noticed his agitation, and relieved him with a cup of wine. — Was it not passing strange, that my appearance should so marvellously disorder one whom I had never seen before? And yet, Inez, there was recalled in the expression of the features bent on mine, a recollection — a dream-like memory of something I had seen before, which to one enveloped in mystery like me, could not but be fraught with emotion."

"Saw you him ever before, Florence?"

"I should answer, No. He is too young to have been a follower of my family; and it is evident, that to the Dark Lady he is unknown. Before I had recovered from my surprise, I heard her silver bell, and I half dreaded to meet her searching eyes, lest they should detect my disorder; but, fortunately, I found the chamber almost dark, and herself too much busied with her own thoughts to turn any attention upon me. She paced the floor slowly, breaking, as she does when aught disorders her, into mutterings that partly betray her thoughts. 'I like them not,' she said; 'thrice did the ring press my finger, and yet I know not which is the one from whom danger is foreshown. Here are *three*. — The tall one — his tale's a lie. He is no common swordsman — all proclaims him noble. The second —

he, too, is of gentle lineage, and looks, what he professes to be, a soldier The third — a groom, or esquire: I did not mark him much; and what I saw was, by our Lady, anything but favourable! I shall watch thy movements, Sir Esquire, better — and if thou or thy comrades have ventured here for aught save passing shelter, look to it!' Then, cursing the absent fool, rating at the monk, and murmuring her surprise at the *Red Hand's* having not reached Doona, she seemed to notice me for the first time, and, as if aware that she had been disclosing more of her thoughts than was advisable, she bade me hastily to leave her, and retire to my chamber for the night."

"Thou hast raised my curiosity much. They can, indeed, be no ordinary visiters. My honoured grand-dame would, at the present season, waste little thoughts upon wandering guests; and if she liked them not, would convey them beyond the mote with scanty ceremony, or consign them to the custody of her grim foster-brother till every doubt was satisfied. I must — I will see them! Florence, think'st thou that the door is yet a-jar? and that our steps will not be heard, as we pass the double door which shuts in the Dark Lady's chamber from the lobby?"

"Nay — that, indeed, would be a hazardous essay. Think you the Ban Oussel, with such suspicions roused, is now unoccupied? — or that she, who, for nights together, will hardly press a couch, on such a one as this has changed her usual habit of watching until sunrise? — No; we must wait patiently till morning, and, if woman's wit will hold, the strangers shall hardly leave the tower till we know more of them. And now to bed, sweet Inez, and I will undress me too. Alas! when will these vile trappings be laid aside, and I adopt a woman's gear? I am weary of this mumming. What can the stern dame fear from me? — me! — a poor friendless orphan! who merely bears a name she once disliked, but which is now weak and powerless, and of no more consideration than that of the lowliest herdsman? Off, filthy doublet!" She flung the silken dress, which was both rich and showily embroidered, far from her, in pettish anger; then, undoing the shamois buskins, which covered an ankle of exquisite shape, she gazed on the fair proportions with the vanity which to woman is so dear. Her companion smiled.

"Why, Florence, the page's dress has chafed you mightily to-night; and yet that gay doublet, yourself must acknowledge, fits thee better than aught beside. Those silken hose — no baron's wife in England wears them finer; and, as thou knowest right well, there is not a limb of fairer shape within the province. Did I not guess thy sex, and had not my heart been already gone, I might have loved thee inadvertently, and too late discovered that I had lost my time in laying springes for a woman! Come — let not this fret thee, Florence: they may call thee page, 't is true — but you know they always add 'the pretty' to the title."

"Ah! Inez, I hate this masculine attire. Was it not provoking, that when the fair-haired knight gazed on me so earnestly and often, he only thought, perhaps, the while, how deftly I could clean a brand, and bear a message to his groom, or a love-token to his lady?"

"Well, patience, Florence! If aught reconciled me to this rude and joyless castle, it was finding thee here: and if — but why speak of such hopeless fortune? — if aught could occur that would enable me to leave it, and I should yet be united to my noble lover, thou shouldst be my companion, and share whatever lot fate might have willed for me."

"I know not, Inez," said the page, "why this night's adventure so deeply interests me. Since infancy I have been pent within these walls, or left them only to wander in the woods around, or attend the ceremonious visits of thy stern grand-dame."

"And were you born here?"

"I know not — nor do I more than guess, that I am one of the luckless family from whom this tower and its possessions were wrested by the sword. I remember being here when but a child; some two or three years passed, and I, brought up with a boy, began to attract the notice of him who held this tower. The boy was several years older than I; and I can remember we were sometimes introduced into the hall on festive meetings, and there treated with kindness and respect. Suddenly a strange breach in my memory occurred — all that in early infancy I knew, vanished; a new and strange people occupied their place. The boy, who seemed in some way connected with me, soon after disappeared; and I have since been under the protection of the Dark Lady, whose kindness at times, when she lays aside her gloomy and distrustful bearing, can be hardly reconciled to the jealousy with which not only my history, but my very sex, is kept concealed. In truth, dear Inez, I learned more from thyself than all besides, when she desired thee to receive me as one of gentle and ancient blood."

"Well, Florence, we are in one thing at least agreed — that the sooner we can leave this sombre house the better. Come, my pretty page, to thy couch, and dream not of the blue-eyed stranger. Let me but look upon that face again." She gazed once more upon the miniature — placed it beneath her pillow — and, while her companion bade her a good repose, and kissed her, "Heaven bless thee, Florence!" said she — "oh, could my absent true-love see a saucy boy press lips I swore no other but his own should touch again! Good-night, sweet page."

Had the fair occupants of the upper chamber, however, designed to continue their conversation, a loud and long-sustained blast upon the moorse horn at the gate would have probably interrupted it. From the high casement the page and the lady saw torches flare, and men pass and repass frequently. Full of curiosity to know who this late visiter might be, who, for hours, as sounds and noises in the castle and court-yard announced, was of sufficient consequence to keep the castle in confusion, they were obliged to satisfy it only by conjecture. Neither monk nor fool, they both concluded, would blow a blast upon the horn two hours past midnight, or occasion such sensation when his entrance was effected. They determined naturally that the kinsman of Tyrone — he of the *Red Hand* — was the personage whose untimely and unwelcome visit had disturbed, at such an unseasonable hour, the inmates of Doona.

But they were wrong in their conjecture — a courier from the Lord Deputy of Connaught, guided by a retainer of the lady, had unexpectedly arrived; and, whatever might be the tenor of his mission — and from all circumstances it would seem to be momentous — none but the Ban Ousel Dhu could tell — and she on this, as on other subjects, was not overly communicative.

CHAPTER XII.

When the horn was winded at the gate, the Lady of Doona was, as we have described her, musing over some deep and intricate policy, which of late entirely engrossed her thoughts. Starting from her seat, she could scarcely believe her senses that the blast she heard was real; but a second, and a louder still, convinced her; and, hastily assuming her loose mantle, she was at the wicket of the gate, while the warder was yet parleying with those who stood without the barrier. When the Lord Deputy's name was mentioned, bars fell and bolts were drawn at once; and, with an honourable welcome befitting the envoy of that noble lord, the messenger of the Deputy was intrusted to the chief warden, with proper orders to see that

ne was fitly entertained. Taking the sealed letters to her chamber, the lady replenished the lamp, and carefully examining the seals and silk that bound the packet, she unclosed it, and read the important contents of the despatch.

That they were of consequence, she argued from the haste used in their delivery, as well as from recognising them to be indicted by the Lord Deputy's own hand; and, as she read, she commented with her own peculiar acuteness on each passage in this state epistle. It was worded thus:

"Honourable and trusty Lady,—We have received from the noble lieutenant of the queen's most excellent majesty, the comfortable news of the total overthrow of that arch rebel, umwhile Earl of Tyrone. So complete was the success of my Lord Mountjoy, that the traitor's following was slain, taken, or dispersed, and he himself is now wandering in extremity, not knowing whither to flee for shelter. He would fain have thrown him on the mercy of the queen's lieutenant, but his repeated treacheries and misdeeds have properly excluded him from pardon." She paused, and laid the letter on the table.—"And is it so?" she said—"O'Neal so totally and hopelessly shipwrecked! a fugitive—an outcast—proscribed and powerless at once. If this be true—and wherefore doubt it?—how narrowly have *I*, who have for forty years steered safely amid a stormy sea, escaped the breakers!—Let me see farther." She thus continued:

"To exterminate the fallen traitor is now our only object; and, on this account I am enjoined by the noble Mountjoy to communicate privately with thyself, our approved and trusty ally."—The lady smiled grimly—"Didst thou know all, friend Deputy, thou wouldst not, possibly, have lauded our loyalty so highly."

"The lieutenant will move by forced marches from the north, while I, with all I can muster, watch the fords and passes, lest our quarry should cross the Shannon by bridge or boat. As we have sure intelligence that he purposes for our province of Connaught, as indeed he is so utterly broken, that to abide even for a week in Ulster is impossible, we apprize thee, honourable dame, in full trust that thy exertions will not be spared, should the false earl venture coastwise from the north. Therefore, we would recommend that due and careful observation be made, and every vessel steering a suspicious course be boarded, and well examined.

"We would apprize you, moreover, of other matters of great moment, appertaining to this our peculiar province, in all confidence and secrecy. We have sure knowledge of a deep and wicked conspiracy being nearly hatched by the rebel's kinsman, O'Neal of the Red Hand, and have already taken steps to crush the traitor and his confederates, root and branch. Of this more anon."

"Ha!" she ejaculated—"was our escape so perilous? Another week, and I was implicated too deeply, mayhap, to escape the ruin of the rest. Fiends seize the fool! What can delay Worouski? But still 'tis fortunate that he carried my last answer to the *Red Hand*, for, if suspicion fell upon me, for holding communication with the kinsman of O'Neal, who will attach import to the letter of which the bearer was a fool? I must act promptly. I will, Lord Deputy, be the queen's best servant, now that her worst enemy is totally undone. Aye, and by the mass! if he falls into my hands, he will fare but poorly. But, soft!—we have not finished our epistle."

"Postscriptum.—I have been advised from the queen's secretary of state, that certain of the followers of the late unhappy Earl of Essex (whom God assoilay!) with the young Earl of Kildare, sailed from the port of Ostend, and, as is averred, in a vessel bound for the coast of Ireland. Should any intelligence reach thee of their arrival on the shores of Con-

caught, thou wilt, without offering violence or constraint beyond such as may be necessary for their security, detain them in thy safe custody, and apprize us of the same. Commending thee to the keeping of the Almighty, we remain thy faithful friend and servant,

"RICHARD BINGHAM.

"Done at the Castle of Athlone, this 21st day of September, in the year of grace 1604."

'And here follows a description of the Earl and his companion — 'tall and noble presence — a cheerful look, at times betraying a touch of melancholy — hair dark — eyes soft and sparkling — small moustache.' By the true cross! the same. So, my good earl, thou art my visiter, it seems. And what of his companion? 'Master of horse to the Earl of Essex — bold and military bearing — brown hair — bright-blue eye — pleasing countenance — assured look — light of speech — ready in action.' — The second to the letter. Now of the third:" — she looked down the list, but laid it down in disappointment. "No, no — he is *not* their follower; and comes he here then on any treacherous intent? It is unlikely; — but we will look to him. And what is my course to follow? What the Lord Deputy expects shall instantly be done. Every galley that can swim shall take the sea; and if O'Neal falls into my hands, my fortune is at the flood. My visiters I'll hold in my possession. They may do me good service; — and now for an hour's sleep, and then for action." She said, and flung herself back upon the cushions of the high chair she occupied, and in a few minutes such was the power of habit, she slept apparently as calmly as if that bold and masculine heart had never known the pangs of blighted love, or throbbed with vengeance and ambition.

In the lower room, in which the belated guests were quartered, the noise and hurry incident on the late alarm had roused the sleepers. But, accustomed to the confusion of a ship, they soon resigned themselves again to repose. Not so their esquire; he listened anxiously to every sound, and from the barred lattice watched every light that passed the casement, till the gray tints of morning appeared in the eastern sky, and the noise and hurry subsided within and without the tower. Nature became wearied of such vigils, and Hubert slept at length as soundly as his light-hearted companions.

But despite the confusion of the night, the Dark Lady was no sluggard in the morning; and her silver bell betimes summoned the handsome page to her apartment, while her fair grandchild still dreamed of her absent knight, and in fancy wandered with him in the convent gardens, where the peaceful sisterhood were wrapped in sleep, and "love alone was waking." But soon these happy visions were dissolved. The noise of persons hurrying to and fro awakened her to sad reality; and the late arrival of the preceding night filled her bosom with fearful anticipations. An hour passed; Florence had already interested her about the strangers, sufficiently to excite a woman's curiosity; and while she awaited the appearance of the page to satisfy her touching the nightly alarm, and convey the expected information of who the visiters might be, the extraordinary bustle in the court-yard, while steeds were saddling, hounds unkennelled, and hawks taken from their mews, (an event of rare occurrence latterly) tended to increase the impatience she felt for the return of her friend. But this suspense was soon ended. Covered with blushes, while her sparkling eyes appeared to dance with pleasure, the expected messenger rushed in, and flinging herself across the couch, which the fair girl had not yet deserted, the page caught her in his arms, as she exclaimed — "Nay, I will kiss thee, Ines, even were thy stout lover looking through the casement. I have tidings for thee, that shall make thee bless the bearer. The courier last night was

no love envoy from the 'Red Hand;' *he* comes not here a suitor. Thanks to the Queen's lieutenant, his wooing is for the present ended. Tyrone is utterly defeated; the O'Neals dispersed, and driven like cattle to the hills. The chief, without home or following, endeavouring to shelter where he can. Mountjoy marching westward; the Deputy in arms to intercept him on the Shannon; and the good dame herself — nay look not so incredulous, — bound, in person, with every galley that can swim, to watch the high seas, lest haply the treacherous rebel should try to win this coast. As to thy lover, Red Hand has one thousand marks upon his head, and outlawry on any who will reset or harbour him. Nay, cease thy kisses, Inez, I am already overpaid; and for them there may be claimants ere the sun goes down."

"What mean you, Florence? Speak, — art thou mad?"

"Why, not particularly — look out upon the court-yard. When did you see hound and hawk before, or steed caparisoned, but for some bearded spearman, with rusty breastplate, and the flying horse upon his battered headpiece? Now read my riddle well. The Lady departs to-morrow by the morning tide; a score of horsemen are already despatched coastward; and boat after boat, as fast as sail and oar can urge them, to warn the islanders to be ready. Well, the strangers are, as you perceive, allowed to hawk and hunt at pleasure; and Dermot is deaf, and Ulic drunken. The warder would not quit his station, lest a gull should cross the sea, and he not observe it first upon the wing. Now, might not the strangers and ourselves accidentally encounter in the forest or on the shore, or even in the court-yard?"

"Florence, thou hast come, indeed, a dove-like messenger: thou hast relieved me from the terrors of that 'Red Hand.' But could we dare to seek converse with these gallants? But to gain some tidings of my lover, I would not venture to cross the stern dame's wishes, which, doubtless, will require our privacy."

"And yet is yonder gray-winged gull to bear thee a love-token? — and as well mayst thou expect intelligence from yon wild bird, as to hear aught here but details of feuds and skirmishes. May not these noble strangers have met thy knight beyond seas. — Nay, rouse thee, Inez — had I such a true love as thine, I would gain tidings of him, were I to seek it in another land, and beg my way over every weary mile that sundered us."

"Well, we may make the attempt."

"*May* — nay, lady fair, we *will* — and, oh, Inez, I wish thou couldst have seen that light-hearted soldier — him with the dark-blue eyes, as he gazed on me this morning, when I bore a spiced cup of wine, by the dame's orders, to their chamber. The tall knight was standing at the casement in pensive mood, his arms crossed upon his breast, and his gaze idly directed on the battlement before him. I tapped upon the door, and when I entered, the tall stranger seemed unconscious of my presence. 'Art thou there, my pretty page?' said the fair gallant, as he took the cup. 'Look,' — and he touched his comrade's arm, 'is not the boy almost too lovely for his sex? — those features so regular — those eyes so intelligent, and that leg! — What, thou hearest me not! art thou at thy old trade of dreaming? and in fancy roaming in another country, touching at moonlight thy melancholy gittern, and swearing to the fair damsel.' — 'Have done, Ralph,' said the other, 'is this a time for jesting, and the page listening to all thou sayest?' — 'Now, God help thee!' replied the lesser knight — 'thy brains are surely gone a wool-gathering. Is not the poor youth speechless? Hadst thou but a sister, my pretty page, and were she like thee, I would love her dearly,' he continued, as he laid his hand upon my head, played with my ringlets, and turned my hair gently over. 'By heaven, Gerald, the boy blushes!' for I found my neck and bosom colour while he spoke and touched me. 'Look on him, thou love-sick dotard — is he not gifted with more than

manly beauty? Aye, boy, hadst thou but a sister like thyself, I could love her fondly, as this dolorous swain beside me dotes upon a dame called Mabel Montagu.' But saints have mercy! — Inez, what ails thee? — pale as a corpse — I 'll run for Kattleen — sit there — and —— "

"Stop, stop!" the fair girl uttered faintly, "for thy life stir not! — Didst thou hear right? Speak quick — art sure the name was Mabel Montagu?"

"Aye, certain — as surely thus he termed the lady he spoke of, as he named his companion Gerald."

"It is himself!" exclaimed the agitated listener; and, as she flung herself upon the page's neck, "Mother of Heaven! can my own faithful Gerald be so near, while I must restrain myself from flying to his arms — but, hark! look to the court-yard, Florence — quick, what seest thou? I thought I heard spurs jingling on the pavement."

"Alas! no; 'tis but the blood-hound, who has slipped his chain from the wall."

"How anxiously will I strain my eyes until I catch even a moment's glance of that well-remembered figure. Florence, knew you what it is to love, then wouldst thou feel as I do."

"I know not," said the page, "exactly, what the symptoms are — but, plague on that strange youth! I cannot get him from my memory — is this anything like love, Inez?"

The fair girl smiled — "Why it is something like it, just when the fit comes on."

"Well," said the page, "I never yet wished to hear the little bell till now. What the foul fiend can the honourable dame be dreaming of? She surely might have sent some token to the strangers that she has not forgotten there be guests within her castle. I wish to hear the tinkle of that bell, as anxiously as I once waited the happy order that dismissed me from attendance on her. Heigh ho! surely the dame is sleeping."

"Now this impatience, Florence, is not unlike another token of the disorder. But hark! there is a footstep on the stair."

While she spoke the voice of the Dark Lady was heard outside talking with the warder, and presently the door unclosed, and she stood before her grandchild and the page.

Whether the presence of the stern dame or the secret consciousness of what had just occupied their thoughts and tongues, occasioned them to feel flurried at the unexpected visit of the lady of the castle, certain it is that confusion was apparent on the countenances of both, and to some indifferent questions their answers were vague and embarrassed. Nor did it pass the observation of the dame.

"Why, what means this alarm?" she said. "Thou art not daunted commonly with our presence, Inez; and thy tongue," as she bent her eyes upon the page, "runs glib enough when its restraint is removed. Have ye been planning the robbery of the dove-cote? or holding treasonable converse on the fashion of a stomacher? Out upon your silliness! Attend to me — I go hence on matters of importance, and it will be probably the morrow's light ere my galley anchors under the castle walls again. There are, as you have doubtless learned already from this malapert, certain strangers come for a short sojourn to Doona. They remain on honourable parole, until a reply to a letter of ours to the lord deputy arrives. 'T is time that thou, Inez, who wilt yet be called to represent this ancient name — and a fit representative a nerveless girl like thee will make for a martial clan!" She smiled in scorn; but softening her stern features, again continued — "'T is fitting, I say, thou shouldst learn to bear thee properly before strangers, and comport thyself in the presence of soldiers and men of action. Thy secluded education, for which we give ourselves some blame, has badly prepared thee

for this duty. In yon dreamy convent, where man was never seen, and in whose sleepy precincts plume never waved, nor rapier sparkled — thou who heardst no voices save the nun's chant — no sound more startling than the organ's swell — there couldst thou learn nothing but prayer, and, mayhap, some touch of medicine. Thou shalt, in my absence, take my place to-morrow. See that the strangers are nobly feasted. — Let the wine flow — the harp be heard — and think that thou art in thy own castle-hall, when the green sward is pressed upon this care-worn breast. Till the morrow thou needst not leave thy chamber, as we sail not till the evening's tide. Ourselves will order all, and feast our visiters when they return from the chase. — Thou didst seem to dread our speaking of a husband to thee last evening. Banish that fear. We have found the *Red Hand* was false to the English queen; and as we have received fresh proofs of her regard for us, we shall be loath to countenance the wooing of her enemy. Look to thy gear, girl, — remember thou art the heiress of Doona, and many a league of land and sea besides. There are some baubles of indifferent value. Array thee as the daughter of a De Burgo and an O'Malley should, and let me hear thou hast not let the hospitality of thy paternal roof lose aught in my short absence. I will, contrary to my intention, leave thee this minion to wait upon thy bidding. Florence, *be silent — mind thou art mute*, or I may find a mode to make thee in reality what thou but seemest now," she said, and left the room.

"Now, holy angels be praised," said the page, when her retreating steps were heard no longer, "I half dreaded she would have taken me in the galley. Is not this marvellous? And see — diamonds, and pearls, and rubies — and jewels, green, and blue, and yellow, set in gold, and sparkling so brightly and gloriously! And so thou never sawest man within the convent walls, nor heardest spur or rapier jingle. Ha! ha! ha! God help thee, dame! though some count thee little less than conjuror, yet thou knowest but little of the sex, and more of culverins and galleys than womens' ways. Did she suppose that thou wouldst mope in cloistered walls, when the gay cardinal and his gallant suite were within a league? Inez, thou hast but told me passages of thy love-story; and as we shall be undisturbed for hours, I should like to hear it all. — Heigh ho! — I marvel much whether I shall ever be in love?"

"Content thee, Florence, for thou art as fairly in the way as woman ever wished. And am I, marry, to confess my courtship to a boy? Come, pretty page, look not so pettishly on hose and jerkin, and thou shalt have the tale."

"And I will sit at the casement; and if a spur rings upon the ground, or a plume dances for a second, believe me, thou shalt know it."

"Agreed, Sir Page."

"Nay, Inez, wilt thou still put the boy upon me?"

"Well, I need hardly tell thee, that I early left my grand-dame's protection for that of my kinswoman, the prioress of St. Juliana. I have scarce a recollection, before I went to Italy, beyond some fleeting memory of a huge tower on a lonely island, and a stern and stately dame, who no doubt was the gracious lady of this castle, — for other scenes have banished earlier impressions. As I was never destined for a religious life, my kinswoman, the prioress, who was neither rigid nor austere, educated me with the daughters of some of the nobility, who were boarders in the house; and I was not only differently brought up from those intended to join the community, but allowed a liberty refused to all besides. My honourable grand-dame, when she committed me to the care of the holy mother, it appears, made but two stipulations, — *one*, that no attempt should be made to induce me to take the veil, and the other, that I should assume another name, until she was pleased to claim me, when I came to womanhood

As she was munificent in her presents to the community, her requests, in themselves of little consequence, were freely granted; and I was brought up by the namesake of the superior, and known only among the sisterhood as Mabel Montagu. What the object of the Dark Lady was in desiring my name to be concealed, I never heard; but her wish on that head was rigidly complied with.

"My childhood and the succeeding years passed over, and were devoid of interest, as the dull and monotonous course of a conventual life generally is; and I attained my seventeenth summer before any incident marked the unvarying scene.

"The event that produced the most important consequences to me was caused by the arrival of the Cardinal —— at his villa, which was at no great distance from the convent. He was a man in the prime of life, of magnificent and courtly tastes and habits, passionately attached to the chase, and the gayest churchman of the holy college. This arrival created an extraordinary sensation in the neighbourhood; it influenced even our hitherto unvaried course of life,—for it was the signal for increased festivity, not only among the noble and dissipated, but, under the sanction of such high example, monastic discipline was abated, and the religious communities themselves became less severe. The superior of St. Juliana, never celebrated for rigorous government, lapsed now into the opposite extreme. The hospitality for which the house was remarkable, became, if possible, more liberal and extensive. The cardinal's visiters were always welcome guests; and while the holy mother and the more elderly of the community were enraptured at the flattering encomiums lavished upon their noble housekeeping, the younger nuns and novices were no less delighted by the homage paid to bright eyes and rosy cheeks, by the gallant cavaliers who daily visited the convent.

"Thus matters stood, when a few evenings before our anniversary festival, which was held with great religious ceremony, in honour of the patron of the community, a peasant brought intelligence to Saint Juliana, that a cavalier, who had for some time past been expected by the cardinal, had unfortunately strayed in the forest from the path, and fallen into a deep pitfall, dug by the hunters for taking wolves. Shortly the wounded knight presented himself at the gate, and on being welcomed and admitted, it appeared, that though not dangerously hurt, his bruises were sufficiently severe to interrupt his journey, and require a confinement of some days. Fearing that if his misfortune was communicated to the lord cardinal, the mishap of his relation might damp the festivity of the gay company, the stranger earnestly requested that the accident might be concealed, and that he should be privately accommodated in the convent, until a few days' rest would enable him to proceed in safety to the villa. His requests were cheerfully acceded to; and so efficacious were the remedies applied to his injuries, that, on the second day he was enabled to quit his chamber for the parlour of the lady prioress.

"This accidental visit, which at another time would have gratified the holy and hospitable mother, was at this particular season a cause of anxiety and uneasiness. The approaching ceremony required all her exertions to give it eclat, for which the anniversary celebration of their saint's day had made the convent of Juliana so remarkable; and that the relation and guest of the lord cardinal should lack the personal attention of the good lady, was to be deplored. After much consultation, the prioress determined to acquaint the gallant himself with the urgency of the case; and, duly apologizing for her apparent neglect, which she begged his indulgence to pardon, she further entreated, that, dispensing with her more profitable and honourable society, he would content himself during the ceremonial with the services of a boarder. It was surprising, indeed, how generously the

polite cavalier acceded to the substitution the holy mother propounded; and I, whose attendance in the approaching procession was not required, was deputed to take my kinswoman's place in nurse-tending the luckless gallant. After receiving full directions from the old nun who had prepared the nostrums for his bruises, with suitable admonitions from the prioress to be vigilant in my attendance, I presented myself in the parlour, whither the invalid had removed.

"I opened the door timidly, and stood before the stranger. In an instant he rose from his chair, and, with a low obeisance, requested me to be seated. I blushed, he seemed embarrassed, and for a moment both were silent. I muttered indistinctly that the prioress had desired me to attend upon him. He smiled. 'Alas!' he said, 'the holy mother must for once have been in jest.—It is I that must be the servant, and thus I offer my homage to thy beauty, lady.' He bent his lips upon my hand, which he had already taken, and placing himself beside me, spoke, in terms of ardent gratitude, his deep acknowledgments of the kind attention he had received from the community of our house. My diffidence vanished—his attentions were redoubled.—Insensibly our conversation became more general and unrestrained, and he listened with delight when he learned from myself that I was not destined for a religious life, but, as a temporary inmate, was merely placed in the convent to complete my education. Nor was he less communicative. He told me, that though nobly born, he was but a soldier of fortune, labouring under the displeasure of the English queen, who, unjustly accusing him of participating in Tyrone's rebellion, rendered it necessary that he should leave Ireland, and reside for a time abroad, under the protection of his kinsman, the cardinal.

"The days devoted to the saint's anniversary passed. Gerald, for so he called himself, had possessed himself of my first love, and in return, he swore the feeling was reciprocal; and after his perfect restoration permitted him no farther plea for remaining longer at the convent, he rode every night from the cardinal's villa, and, securing his horse in the forest, spent hours beneath my casement, or walking by moonlight on the terrace. How long matters would have thus continued, it is impossible to tell. To wed, would be an act of madness;—he a proscribed man, and I dependent on the bounty of my stern grand-dame; and yet we spoke of little else, while many a wild and romantic scheme of life was proposed only to be rejected. Alas! we did not foresee, that an event would separate us speedily, when we believed that nothing was likely to interrupt our midnight interviews.

"'Mabel,' he said, 'I must leave thee for a week, for the lord cardinal has business of great moment to transact at Mantua, which requires a confidential agent, but I will count every minute till I return, my love!' The idea of even a temporary separation pained me to the heart, and I wept bitterly. My handsome lover consoled me as he best could, and when the first streak of day appeared, he pressed me to his bosom, and covering my cheeks with kisses, quitted the garden; while I followed his tall figure with my aching eyes, until the trees concealed him from my view, and then, throwing myself upon my couch, I wept for hours.

"The rest of the tale is shortly said. An unexpected courier arrived from the Lady Grace, and imperiously recalled me without assigning any reason for her sudden order; and, with one day's preparation, I was obliged to set out for Ireland. I thought my heart would burst. Was I to see my lover no more, and leave home almost without a chance of our meeting hereafter. I wrote to him—'t was all I could—and a kind novice promised to have the letter forwarded. Whether it reached him I know not; and now, to feel that he is near me, and yet dread to meet him, and to hear his loved voice again!—But, hark!—Look, Florence to the court-yard—surely I heard the gates unclosing!"

As she spoke, the tramp of horses' feet, and the noise of a numerous retinue, announced the return of the hunters. Inez sprang forward to the casement, and, with her arm around the page's neck, gazed on the entering crowd with breathless anxiety. Huntsmen and falconers, and other attendants on the chase, issued from the archway of the tower. At last a cavalier, mounted on a chesnut courser, passed into the area beneath. "'T is the lesser knight," said the page; "Holy angels! how gallantly he backs yon charger. Is he not, in faith, a handsome soldier?" and her eyes danced with pleasure. Inez, with a beating heart, listened to the page without replying. Presently the heavy jar of the castle-gates told that the last of the train had entered. "*He* is not there," she faintly murmured, and an ashy paleness overspread her cheeks, which but a few moments since were died with crimson. Tears filled her eyes, and she turned sorrowfully from the casement.

"See!" cried the page, delighted. The fair girl again raised her head, as a knight rode from beneath the archway. His Arab was gallantly caparisoned, while the noble horsemanship of the rider was worthy of the steed that bore him. His white plume almost touched the low-browed arch as the charger paced proudly into the court-yard; and, when he leaped lightly from the saddle, and flung the bridle to a groom, and his tall and commanding figure topped the collected hunters who filled the area, Inez, with a shriek of rapture, flung her arms about her faithful friend; and, hiding her burning face in his doublet, exclaimed — "It is — *it is my own Gerald!*" while, overcome by delight, she sank upon the bosom of the page.

CHAPTER XIII.

The sun was nearly level with the ocean, and the placid hour of evening was come; heath and forest were clad in "sober livery;" and that stillness which marks departing day reigned over the wide expanse of copse and moorland, which for many a league stretched round the tower of Doona. Over the extensive landscape which the warder could command from the battlements, the peasant was seen returning to his bent-roofed cottage, and the herdsman removing the cattle under his charge from their pasturage, to secure them for the night in the enclosure beneath the castle-walls — a precaution which the numerous marauders that infested those mountain districts rendered necessary. The shadows of the trees already wrapped the forest in partial obscurity, and the moon was not yet risen upon the green alleys, which, crowded during daylight with herds and keepers, were now totally deserted. The deer was in his lair, the heath-cock in his nest, and the woodland solitude was undisturbed save by one man, who, from beneath the shadow of an immense oak, watched the long vista of the forest, which led directly to the castle-gate. Closely enveloped in a horseman's cloak, the stranger occasionally left the concealment of a tree to obtain a better prospect of the path, by which it would appear he expected the arrival of some person, whose destination was the tower of Doona. He seemed weary of his watch, manifesting his impatience by rapid and irregular movements on the green alley before the oak, while he muttered, in an under tone, "Now, what the foul fiend detains them? Surely, ere this, priest or fool might have managed to return. Little does either dream that I am in the tower — that the heir of the proscribed race harbours in the very den of the destroyer! 'T were ill we met them first, for Sathanas himself would not alarm the holy porpoise more, than if I crossed him unadvisedly. I must guard them against surprise, and warn them of my com-

ing. And — soft! — yonder comes a human figure: 'tis not the priest - the gait and person are neither those of the burly churchman. 'T is likelie the fool; and I 'll sconce myself behind this tree, and be certain of Worowski, ere I hazard a discovery."

Shrouding himself behind the huge trunk of the oak, the object of his attention came forward at a quick and peculiar kind of trot, which promised to bring his journey to a speedy termination. The stranger's appearance, even in the faint light, was grotesque and singular. He was of unusually short stature, but squarely and powerfully framed, and, although beyond the middle age, his clothes were as remarkable for a variety of colours, as the ridiculous taste in which the artist had been pleased to cut them. The jerkin fitted closely to his shape, and with the nether garment, was made of party-coloured serge; he wore deer-skin buskins; and, as he had disencumbered himself of hose, probably for better expedition, his bare and muscular legs, covered with a shock-crop of red hair, added to the oddity of his appearance. On his cap and sleeve the flying horse was rudely blazoned, announcing him to be a retainer of the Dark Lady, while in his belt the Irish dagger or middoge hung, and a leathern case was suspended round his neck for the security of the letters with which it appeared he was intrusted. Instead of pole-axe or hunter's spear, he held in his left hand two or three short and pointed stakes, with which, as the legends of the country avouch, he struck even distant objects with amazing dexterity and force. He came down the broad vista at a fast and constant pace, and was passing the oak, when a deep voice from the thicket called him to stop. But the order was not obeyed, for, mending his pace and seizing a pointed stake in his right hand, he continued his journey. Again the voice was heard, accompanied by a peculiar whistle. The signal was recognised — the courier stopped, bent ear, and ran up towards the thicket from whence the sound proceeded. While the stranger, issuing from the copse, said softly, "It is I, Worowski," and advanced to the spot where the messenger had halted, uttering an exclamation; the person addressed dropped the pointed stick, and, with mixed indications of surprise and affection, seized the stranger's hand, "And is it thou? Holy Saint Bridget! who would have thought that you should be hiding in the copse, and that not beyond the reach of a musquetoon from the tower."

"Hiding, fool — not I, in faith — I am not now obliged to keep the thicket, or prowl at midnight round the walls, that by right of birth should call me master. I am not two hours from the castle."

"You jest with me — in the castle! art thou weary of life, or thinkst thou the stern dame has lost her memory, and ceased to hate thy name and race? This is worse than madness — in what semblance and disguise hast thou ventured where all to thee are deadly enemies?"

"Simply in the respectable office of esquire to a brace of beggared nobles; and he who should command, serves at the board and ministers to the orders of the she-wolf, who usurped his rights and slaughtered his family."

"Hush, hush! trees have had ears before now, and time presses, for I bear important letters —"

"With which thou needst not hurry. The Ban Oussel is off with every galley she can man — she returns not till to-morrow night."

"And gone without waiting for intelligence? — surely, for once her caution has forsaken her," said the fool.

"She has had," replied the squire, "despatches from the deputy. In a word, hear how matters stand. You know I carried O'Neal's envoy to the court of Spain from the northward, and landed him safely in a French port, and, in return, conveyed arms and powder hither. Two passengers accompanied us. I knew them — and how it matters not. Weary of the life I

led —tool of a bloody and false scoundrel like Tyrone — and engaged in the petty treachery of communicating between rebels at home, too timid and impotent to kick off the yoke that galls them, and a powerless ally abroad, neither able nor anxious to assist, I found my mortal enemy about to join the discontented, and plunged headlong into rebellion. This opened up a chance of vengeance, and I came hither to watch until I could betray her to the Lord Deputy. But if ever mortal dealt in magic, I would swear that the she-wolf borrows assistance from the fiend. She stood upon the very brink of destruction, when lo! O'Neal is overpowered, the *Red Hand* ruined, and that too before the Dark Lady was compromised in the rebellion, or had committed herself by a single act. She will now be more loyal than ever, and, if possible, in higher favour with the English Lieutenant. Alas, Worowski, every hope of humbling my enemy is crushed, and I must see my inheritance usurped — my family extinguished — my sister a menial in her father's hall — and not even allowed the privilege of a woman to wear the garments of her sex."

"Yet is the Dark Lady kind to her," said the fool, "and her grandchild loves her as a sister. Some hidden jealousy occasions her anxiety to conceal her name and sex."

"And I cannot at present venture to acquaint Ella with our relationship. Here, in this tower, she is safe, at least, from danger and insult. I have no home save the ocean wave, or the pathless forest — I have no house to shelter, no power to protect her — I, a wanderer, an outcast! By heaven! when I recognised my only relative in the page's livery, I thought my heart would burst, as I witnessed the humiliation our once proud name had undergone; and I was half tempted to strike my poignard into the stern oppressor of my family. But then Ella would be friendless — her only protector would be gone; and for her I would fain preserve this life, of which, alas, I am more than weary!"

"Nay," said the fool, "this is womanly; where is the daring and enduring courage that once you boasted? Patience; — these halls may yet be thine, and fate restore thy fortunes."

"No, no, Worowski. Our name and race must terminate with me. Would that Ella and myself had perished in the storm, from which thy kindness, Ommadawn, preserved us! She would be safe from misery and degradation, and I would long since have avenged my wrongs deeply, had I failed in recovering my wrested rights. But where is the monk? will he soon return?"

"I marvel he has not ere now been at the castle. He went on the annual pilgrimage he makes for the soul's weal of those who perished when Doona was taken. If the lady guessed the object of his journey to Croagh Patrick, I trow his welcome here would be indifferent. She suspects him strongly of aiding your escape, and ten years have not removed the impression."

"'T was boldly done. I remember how the poor monk trembled, lest the rope with which he lowered me from the battlement should be frayed against the building, and break ere it reached the ground. And in the asylum where he placed me, had I but fancied an easy life, with nothing demanded in return but a stray ave or a passing benison, I might have slept away time and vengeance together. But, as thou know'st, I preferred seeking fortune on the Spanish seas, to dreaming my life away within the gloomy walls of Ballintubber. But the poor monk meant kindly: to him, life has nothing better than the groaning board, and sparkling wine-cup, the easy bench, and blazing wood fire; and while treason is abroad, and domestic plots are hatching, he cares not for what the statesman loses his rest. His curiosity is contented with the confessions of the herdsman's wife, or the idle gossip which forms the shrift of some pretty villager."

"And now that Tyrone's plot is over, what wilt thou do?" said the Ommadawn.

"By our Lady! I know not. My galley returns to-morrow night, and I have half resolved to discover myself to the Dark Lady, commend poor Ella to her kindness, and pledge me, in return, that I will for ever free her from alarm upon my account, and, as other gallant youths are doing, take to the Virginia voyage, and make a fortune, or end a life not worth the purchase of a pin's fee."

"Do nothing hastily," said his party-coloured adviser. "The lady waxes into years; she has no male succession; the English queen might hear your wrongs, and do them justice."

"Yes — for abetting her worst enemy, and opening a communication with Spain, when every channel beside had failed! No, Worowski: there, too, my ill fortune crossed me, and I had not even the satisfaction of involving the dame of yonder tower in the treason which I mainly kept alive by my personal exertions, because I thought sooner or later she was sure to be committed. Think you, I would have supported for himself a villain like Tyrone — that brutal voluptuary — that being without one saving virtue? — No. I sought vengeance — which I cannot obtain."

"I still hope a happier result. I would sacrifice life for thee, or for any descendant of my master's house, as thou well knowest: and even in my dark hours, when reason becomes clouded, and my infirmity presses my wandering mind, even then thy image is before me, and my wayward thoughts turn to the last male heir of the Macmahons. But let us hasten on — and — softly! — saw you aught in the lady's private alley? Again — yes. There are two — and females, from their size: who may they be?"

"We'll soon determine. Move silently through the thicket, and we shall get within a few yards unperceived. Now, saints and devils! if yonder be not two men — aye, and my good masters, or my sight plays false. Soho, Worowski! there is something more to do than the Dark Lady dreams of. — What says the playman? —

'There glides more water past the wheel,
Than wots the miller of.'

But come on; thou and I will soon be wiser than we are at present." As he spoke, he turned into the thicket, and the Ommadawn followed.

CHAPTER XIV.

MEANWHILE, in the castle, evening brought its customary festivity. The banquet was served, and the Dark Lady presided at the board: all that could mark respectful attention to her guests was done by the noble dame. When the table was cleared, and cup and flagon occupied the place which had lately been loaded with goodly viands, the Ban Oussel right courteously pledged the knights in a stoup of muscadine, and, having apologized for leaving them for a short space, begged that what her poor house afforded should be freely at the disposal of her respected visiters. "The tide," she said, "was nearly half flood, and she must reach her castle of Clare Island ere sunset." She retired in state from the apartment, and the seneschal, with the handsome page, having laid a fresh supply of wine flasks, obtained permission to withdraw.

The breeze was light and favourable; and from the window of the tower the knights could see the galley unmoor, and loose her canvass. Presently, a barge pulled from beneath the walls, and, seated in the stern,

the tall and majestic female figure at once was recognised to be the Lady of Doona. She soon reached the galley, and immediately the sails were filled, and the vessel bore away for the entrance of Achil Sound. The knights watched its progress until the high land of Innisbiggle shut the galley from their view.

"Well, Gerald," said the lesser stranger, "what think you of our new quarters? By St. George! the change is marvellous! Now hunting and feasting, after being welcomed at the pike's point, and questioned with a loaded harquebuss ready to repay a slip in the story with an ounce or two of lead. The place and the people are a mystery.—Our lady hostess, the pretty page, and our trusty 'squire, all riddles alike; and the castle, too, and its horses and hawks,—by this hand! I never crossed a better steed, or saw quarry struck so well. Gerald, what think you of the page? her sex is evident! Strange, that I, who passed the ordeal of a court untouched, should first feel love's smart from bright eyes and taper ankle concealed beneath a page's guise."

"Nay," said his companion, laughing, "thou shalt dare a higher flight, Ralph. What think you of the Ban Oussel? She wants a lord,—and so do these broad lands. Thou couldst hold this town sturdily, and with her kinnahans and galleys, in these stirring times, buffet it with the best. She looks upon thee favourably. Try thy fortune; and the chesnut barb, and hawks, and lady, may ere long call thee master."

Montravers smiled; "I am not the daring adventurer, Friend Gerald, that you take me for.—Why, were I mated with the dame, a suspicion of conjugal inattention would ensure me a broken crown; and if I ventured to remonstrate, she would end the argument with a home thrust of yonder plaything that dangles in her girdle. No, Gerald, I'll wive no woman who uses any weapon keener than her tongue.—But our 'squire has taken himself off,—I know not what to think of him?"

"We owe him a hospitable resting-place, at least.—Come, Ralph, we'll finish the flask, and, as the evening is so fair, stroll into the forest, and talk our plans over, where we shall be neither interrupted nor overheard."

"Agreed;—sound the silver call beside thee."

The page obeyed the summons.

"Come hither, my pretty boy.—Our 'squire deserts us—wilt thou fetch our cloaks and rapiers?—we would stroll into the forest for a while."

The page bowed, and disappeared; returning presently, he laid the swords and mantles on the table, and taking from his girdle a key of curious workmanship, signed, that there was a door by which they could get egress to the woods without passing the castle gates, and hastily left the chamber.

"Here is more mystery," said the tall knight.

"Well, no matter;—on with cloak and rapier, and we'll see what fortune has in store."

Accordingly, descending the stairs, they turned in the direction the page had pointed, and, in angle of the wall, a small, but strong and iron-banded door, was found. The ponderous lock yielded freely to the key the boy had given them, and by a single plank, which formed a temporary bridge, they crossed the moat, and found themselves in the open space between the wood and the castle walls. Following a path that seemed but little beaten, they entered the forest, and under the shelter of ancient oaks and mighty pine-trees, communed upon their adverse fortunes, and what future course were best to be adopted.

An hour elapsed; the sun was gradually dipping in the western sky, and in the distant landscape objects had become indistinct.—"Evening has fallen, Ralph, and we had better return to our quarters, lest a longer

absence might raise suspicions that we intended bidding farewell to Doona, before our lady hostess returned to receive our parting courtesies."

"Little fear of that," replied his companion; "men rarely leave stone walls for a skyey covering, without having some better reason than you and I, for preferring this forest to yonder tower. — But, holy angels! who have we here? — women — and in a wood! Soho, Sir Page! the key was not given without a meaning. Now, Gerald, forget Mabel for a while, and let me hear how gallantly thou wilt address these fair incognitæ. By Saint George! if this be not faery land, I will forswear romances. — A dark dame — mysterious 'squire — dumb page — and forest beauties. — Nor do they shun us either. They come bravely on — forward, Gerald, thou shalt lead the van, open the assault, — and now for thy best flight of poesy."

The tall knight smiled. "Nay, Ralph, to a practised gallant like thee, I would — or it would be strange presumption — resign the post of honour. By heaven! two women, and of no common beauty, if face and person be in keeping."

The unknown females stopped within a few paces of the cavaliers, who were vainly endeavouring to conjecture who they might be. There was nothing remarkable in their dress, which was rather adapted to muffle and conceal, than display the figure of the wearers. The air, particularly of the taller lady, at once declared them persons of honour; and as they both were closely veiled, it was impossible to catch even a transient glance at the faces of these mysterious females. One thing struck the knight — in one there seemed an implied superiority. The taller lady leaned upon the shoulder of her companion, and Fitzgerald concluded that there might be some difference in their rank. Nor was the circumstance lost upon his comrade. Whether Montravers felt his qualities to be rather martial than gallant, certain it is, that he had come to a conclusion, that the lesser incognita was also the least formidable of the twain; and accordingly he touched his friend's sleeve, and whispered — "Gerald, attack the tall one, an thou lovst me." But his fears were promptly removed, if he dreaded a tete-à-tete with the stately dame. In reply to a courteous greeting from Fitzgerald, the taller lady, in a few words spoken in an under tone, desired "a private converse with the speaker, while her friend remained under the honourable charge of his companion." The knight bowed, and placing himself beside the fair one, they turned into a green vista, and proceeded slowly down the alley. Montravers and the lady's companion were, consequently, left together; and though on a battle-field there never was a stouter heart or prompter hand, yet, on this occasion, his wit and courage appeared to have totally deserted him. After several essays, at what he purposed should be a complimentary address, his speech ended in a few inarticulate remarks, from which something touching "sweet evenings and green woods" might be collected. Nor was his companion apparently disposed to relieve his embarrassment; for when he mechanically inclined towards the path the taller cavalier had taken, the incognita, turning to another glade, observed that "her friend would possibly, on this occasion, prefer an uninterrupted converse with his comrade, although the society of so courteous a cavalier would at other seasons be most desirable."

There was an arch and playful manner in which the lady spoke, that did more to recall the self-possession of the confused knight, than any exertion of his own could have effected. His pride took alarm instantly. "She laughs at me," he said; "and faith, no wonder — I, wearing a man's beard and rapier, to stammer like a bashful boy, because I am, forsooth, left with a woman in a wood. — Lady," he said, "thou hast, indeed, corrected me: — woodland walks are not adapted for crowded companies; and thou and I will ramble down yon shady path, and leave our companions to their own affairs. — What a hand!" he exclaimed, as he pressed it to his lips; but

the lady gently removed it. "No, Sir Knight," she said, "although 't were ill-judged to intrude upon the knight and lady, yet I would and must continue within view, for such were the orders of the Lady Inez."

"Ha! and is yonder fair one the heiress of the castle, of whom men speak so much and see so little?"

"She is."

"And thou ——"

"Her companion — and, now, in return, might I pray thee to tell me who yonder stranger is?"

The master of horse was puzzled by the sudden question, and muttered "A man — a — a gentleman."

"Why that is some information, certes, — I conjectured this already from his clothes."

"He is a soldier, lady — a knight."

"Very important, truly, and yet I inferred it from his spurs."

"Now she is laughing at me," said Montravers.

"Where may he be from?" asked the lady.

"Some place abroad."

"And whither going?"

"That he cannot guess himself."

"And now, since thy tale concerning thy friend, gentle sir, has been so satisfactory, might I presume to ask some news about thyself?"

"Mine is the same story to the letter."

"Well, truly," said the lady, "ye be two gentlemen of perfect candour, touching your histories and travels. But plague on the closeness of the evening! one breathes with difficulty so muffled;" and, as she spoke, she threw aside the veil that hitherto had concealed her face, and the knight, in utter astonishment, recognised the handsome features of the page.

"Now, by St. George! this is surprising, lady," he said; "have I not seen this face before?"

"It is hard for me, brave sir, to solve the question. Thou art a visiter in the castle, and I an inmate: therefore, unless you generally keep your eyes closed, it is not improbable that you may have seen me frequently."

"Nay, but my sweet page —" and the knight seized her hand.

"Page!" said the lady impatiently, as she disengaged her hand; "why now I doubt thou hast not indeed noticed me. Hast thou been moon-blind long, Sir Knight? Wast thou so from birth? or was it caused by accident? In the latter case, the leech, they say, may cure it."

"Now, by heaven!" thought the knight, "she plays with me as I were a baby. — I am not so blind, my pretty maiden, but that I can occasionally discern a woman from a boy — aye, though she ruffle in hose and doublet, and do the bidding of the Dark Lady of Doona."

"But the page is dumb. — Hast thou any reason to infer that I labour under a similar infirmity?" asked the lady.

"Nay, upon my soul, I am certain thou hast full possession of thy tongue. But who art thou? — thy name? — thy home? — thy family?"

"Fairly, Sir Knight, or thy questions will come too fast for reply; — and yet, thy own candour merits, on my part, an equal confidence. My name is Florence, my home yonder tower: and as to my family, when I know that history, I will tell it thee, if thou be curious then."

"And yet, the wondrous likeness to the page!" said the knight.

"Is there anything so marvellous in my bearing a resemblance to my own brother?"

"Well, fair one, an thou wilt not tell me more of thyself," said the cavalier, "who is yonder lady who speaks with my companion? — and see, his arm is round her waist. Holy angels! — Gerald, Gerald! that I had

but half thy impudence! — Is she the Lady Inez — the heiress of Doona?" — She nodded an affirmative — "And, like her honoured grand-dame, can back a horse, steer a galley, use harquebuss and hand-bow, and, no doubt, play with a trinket like this," and he touched his poignard, "which, doubtless, dangles in her girdle?"

"Nay, you rather overrate my friend's accomplishments."

"Well, then, wilt thou tell me of her more?" said the knight.

"I fear," replied the lady, "thou wouldst not keep my counsel."

"Nay, I will, in good troth."

"And not even tell thy companion yonder?" inquired his fair friend.

"Certainly, if thou biddest me not."

"Then I will trust thee thus far — she is —" and the lady paused.

"Nay, go on," cried Montravers, impatiently.

"And thou wilt not tell it?"

"By my soul's hopes! I will not."

"She is a woman!" and the fair speaker laughed outright as she observed Montravers' visible disappointment.

"Come, Sir Knight, sit down upon this fallen elm — give me a full and honest history of thyself — and, in return, I will tell thee aught than I can speak in honour."

"Agreed," said the master of horse, "and thou wilt not laugh at me again?"

"Why that depends mainly upon thy tale," said his companion.

"Well, listen — but how like thy brother's ankle thine is — and those eyes and lips!"

"Pshaw!" said the lady, "attend to thy tale, and forget the lips and ankles, or thou wilt confuse thy story to a moral."

"Now for a touch of invention," thought Montravers, as he placed himself upon the fallen tree, where his companion was already seated.

While the honest knight proceeded with his history, which was indeed anything but a well-connected narrative, his taller friend was deeply occupied in conversing with the Lady Inez. When she had expressed a wish to speak with him apart, Fitzgerald politely took her hand: —

"Fully sensible, lady, that I am honoured by your commands, I would beg to know whom I have the felicity to address, and were I to beg a bolder favour, I would entreat my fair friend to withdraw the veil that hides a countenance which, doubtless, must be lovely."

"Stop, Sir Knight," said a soft voice, whose tones appeared not perfectly unknown to him. "Thou shalt know the one, and possibly may see the other, but this depends upon thyself."

"Nay, then, I shall see it certainly," exclaimed the cavalier — "for the terms must be hard indeed, that I shall not accede to, when such condition attends compliance with them."

"I am the Lady Inez!" — the knight bowed profoundly, — "and, hearing that a soldier and a gentleman was in Doona, I made bold to seek an interview, to tell him that I was in difficulty, and beg from him knightly and honourable assistance."

"I feel your condescension, lady," said the tall gallant, "and if my poor services are of any use, command their best exertions."

"Spoken like a noble soldier," said the lady. "Attend to me, Sir Knight — thou hast haply heard that I am heiress to the Dark Lady of Doona — and, I lament to add, she has latterly determined that I shall be wedded to one she has selected for my lord, and, without consulting my wishes, has chosen for me a consort, not only unknown in person, but who, from public rumour, I am prepared to dread and detest. I would avoid the consequences of such a union. Thou knowst my grand-dame by reputation; and, when I tell thee she has already determined that the marriage

shall take place, I ask thee, noble stranger, what hope is left of my escape from this abhorred union?"

"I feel for thee, lady," replied Fitzgerald, as he took her hand; "but, alas! what beside pity can I offer. Thou knowst not how utterly friendless and helpless is he to whom you speak."

'Nay, but say boldly, what is the only hope for one circumstanced as I?"

"Flight," said the cavalier.

"And whither?" asked the lady.

"Alas! I cannot tell," the knight responded, with a sigh.

"Stranger, time passes, and I must at once be candid. Thou hast heard the hateful fate that is my destiny if I remain longer in Doona. I would — I *will* fly from this hated tower. Men call me handsome, — my lineage is noble — my prospects, if my grand-dame relents, not humble. My jewels are valuable; I have a richer casket than any peeress in the land; I have seen thee. — Wilt thou be the partner of my flight? Wilt thou share my fortunes, and give me a husband's name and protection."

The knight started — his colour changed; he seemed labouring under powerful emotions; at last, he resumed the lady's hand, which, when she first proposed to marry him, he had dropped.

"Lady, pardon the embarrassment your unexpected and unmerited proposal has occasioned, and when you hear who I am, and how I am circumstanced, I trust you will admit the utter impossibility of my accepting the honour you would bestow. I am a persecuted man."

"I know it."

The stranger started; "That is marvellous. My squire has played me false!"

"There, noble knight, you err," replied the lady.

"Well, no matter; thou hast my secret, and it imports little how it was betrayed; but more, lady, I am already plighted to another, and, brilliant as your offers might be to a nameless and unfriended outlaw, by me they must be unaccepted, for I have neither heart nor hand to give."

"Pshaw! 't is some boyish fancy; some contract idly entered into, which haply, ere now, the lady herself has forgotten."

"Oh, no! Mabel, my idolized Mabel! I would not wrong thee by harbouring such suspicion for a moment."

"Mabel?" said the lady, quickly; "why I once knew a lady so called; she was my fellow boarder at ——"

"The convent of St. Julian?" exclaimed the knight, with breathless curiosity.

"She was; she loved a kinsman of the lord cardinal, and when she was called away suddenly, she left a billet for her lover, which I engaged to forward."

"And which, alas! I never received. Oh, lady, tell me, knowst thou aught of my beloved Mabel? Where does she dwell? — where shall I seek her? — tell me she lives — and loves —"

"And rests upon the bosom of her faithful Gerald —" as the veil fell, and Inez de Burgo was clasped within the arms of her knight, who covered her lips and cheeks with kisses.

Now it so happened, that Fitzgerald and his fair companion had, at the denouement of their dialogue, reached an opening in the trees, from which the rapturous termination that closed their interview was visible to Ralph Montravers and his attentive auditor, and unhappily, a change of position in the lady again presented the page's ankle to his view. Suddenly he ceased a confused story of his adventures with Sir Walter Raleigh. "Confound Virginia!" he exclaimed, — "page or page's sister, the secret

must be out, — I love thee madly!" and catching the listening girl in his arms, he pressed his lips to hers.

His fair companion gently disengaged herself, as she archly observed, "Well, if it be not a marvellous story! and yet in all the narrative thou didst not tell thy name, and upon that point I am wonderfully curious."

"My name! Pshaw — 'tis a common one — Reginald Redwick," and the knight blundered sadly.

"And yet Ralph, methinks, is just as good, and somewhat shorter than either," replied the lady.

Montravers coloured; "Yes, Ralph is, as you observe, shorter."

"Humph," continued his companion; "and thou wert something in this Sir Walter's train, I reckon?"

"I was his — ancient."

"His ancient!" said the lady. "Now for my part, I would rather have been his *master of horse*."

Montravers sprang from the tree, while his companion laughed heartily, and he had again seized the hand of his handsome auditor, when a slight noise was heard from the adjoining copse; and, when Montravers and his startled companion turned their eyes, Hubert, attended by a singularly dressed person, was seen standing within a few paces of the tree they sate on. Mortified at the untimely appearance of the squire, the knight regarded him with an angry look.

"Did you call me?" said Hubert, with a countenance in which no appearance of surprise or emotion was visible.

Montravers did not answer — while his companion sprang from the tree, and hastily adjusted the veil which had been thrown aside. Fitzgerald approached with Lady Inez. "Fear nothing — only be prudent, and we may yet be happy," said the latter. "But who have we here — thy squire and Worowski — this is indeed unlucky. Pray return by the gate, and we shall reach the castle by the postern. Adieu — nay, not a moment's delay, if you love me, Gerald. You shall hear from me shortly. — Farewell."

She spoke — and, taking her companion's arm, gracefully saluted the lesser knight, kissed her hand affectionately to Fitzgerald, and turned into a close and tangled pathway, which speedily concealed her from view.

"So, Sir Squire," said the tall cavalier, "we want you in the hall, and find you in the forest."

"I pray your pardon," said Hubert; "I did believe that, for one evening, my waiting was unnecessary. Your squire is but an awkward cupbearer — at least my master here will say it; a page hands the chalice daintily."

Montravers coloured. "Dost thou jest with me?"

The squire bowed respectfully. "No, gallant sir — but 'tis not wondrous that a *boy* like the lady's page should pass a cup more deftly than a knight's rough gentleman. But, noble sirs, can you spare my attendance for an hour or two?"

"Certainly," replied both strangers.

"And this shall be your guide to the castle. Worowski, conduct the knights." Hubert turned into the copse; while, under the guidance of their party-coloured conductor, the English visiters presented themselves at the gates of Doona, and were admitted with military honours.

CHAPTER XV.

When the cavaliers found themselves in the castle hall, their conversation naturally turned upon their evening's adventure in the forest. Both had made discoveries — one that he was actually under the same roof with his lost lady — and the other, that he was irrevocably in love; but, as he swore by the saints, whether with a page or a page's sister, it were impossible to decide. Fitzgerald smiled. "Canst thou not yet persuade thyself that the page is a very woman, Ralph. They say love is blind — and thou art on this point utterly so: but I will solve thy doubts speedily. Touch the silver call promptly, and thou wilt find thy friend the page invisible."

"By Saint George! this will determine it," exclaimed the lesser knight, as he made the accustomed signal.

The sound was scarcely heard before the door of the apartment opened; and, to the utter astonishment of both cavaliers, the page himself, habited in his doublet and hose, brought tapers, which he placed upon the table, and, bowing to the knights, made the usual mute signs when he required to know their farther pleasure.

"This is, indeed, a puzzle," said Fitzgerald; "come hither, boy;" but the page stood still, as if he neither heard nor guessed the order. The tall knight seemed determined to remove his doubts; he took the taper in his hand, and examined the form and features of the page with fixed attention for a moment, then, waving his hand, the boy bowed, and left the room.

"Well, Gerald, is not this miraculous?" asked Montravers.

"I see nothing more wondrous in it, than that the page lost little time in exchanging the kirtle for the doublet," replied Fitzgerald.

"And think you 't is a woman?"

"Aye, Ralph; thou mayst love her after all, and none will laugh at thee. Why, didst thou not see the blush rise to her very brow, when she observed me viewing her, and — but how blind a lover is — the very dew is damp upon her buskins."

"Alas! one doubt is but removed; the sad misfortune still remains; — that I should love one whom my birth would render it impossible to wed; and yet, by Heaven! I never felt for woman as I do for this young girl."

"There is a strange mystery about her," said Fitzgerald. "I would have inquired the truth from Inez, as we returned home, but Hubert and that Ommadawn, as they call him, interrupted us so unluckily. But patience, Ralph, I 'll find out all; surely that air and bearing never belonged to one in humble life. Have courage; thy course of love may yet run smoother than all things promise."

"No; the hand of fortune has turned against me. See, thou hast hardly laid foot on shore, but the very object of your pursuit drops without trouble into your arms in a wood; while I, for honest service to my gallant and ill-starred patron, am driven into exile, without a hope that better days will come. My enemies in power — my kinsmen in disgrace — my patrimony forfeited — a price upon my head — and to top the whole, my heart stolen by a nameless being, whom 't were alike shame to wed and sin to injure."

"Nay, courage, Ralph; for, alas! I am but little better off. I have, 't is true, found a lost love, but, alas! I dare not claim the treasure. Thy proscription is but temporary. The queen will ere long discover the wrongs of Essex, and no doubt do tardy justice, by removing the penalties his friends have undergone. But for me, such is the malignant hatred she bears my very name, and such her rage and disappointment at the failure of her

lieutenants in Ireland, that were an angel to whisper I was innocent, she would refuse him credit. But still will I hope, and ——"

Before Fitzgerald could finish the sentence, Montravers, who had been leaning against the casement, suddenly seized his cap, and exclaiming, 'Now, by Heaven, I will at least be satisfied on one point;" he rushed down the stairs, and, next moment, his companion saw him crossing the corner of the court-yard that led to the postern, by which they had left the castle in the evening.

While the lesser knight was listening to his friend, his eyes had unconsciously wandered towards the direction in which the private entrance to the castle was placed. Although that portion of the court-yard was shaded by the lofty wall, yet a human figure was seen crossing the space below; and as it passed where a stream of moonlight flashed through an arrow slit, the momentary glance betrayed the person to be the page. In a few seconds, Montravers was in the court, and, favoured by the concealment of the wall, he saw the object of his curiosity softly unclose the postern, and, after a short pause, as if to ascertain that he was unremarked, cross the plank that led over to the esplanade beneath the battlements. The knight followed on tip-toe, and when he gained the private door, he observed the page searching anxiously in the moonlight, as if he was looking for something that had fallen. The search was unsuccessful, and, vexed at the result, the seeker muttered, in a tone of sorrow and impatience, "Saints and angels! what will become of us; the key is surely lost!" Without delay, the cavalier stepped from his concealment, while the unfortunate page half screamed at his sudden appearance. In a moment Montravers was across the moat; and, the pseudo boy perceiving that his secret was discovered, vainly endeavoured to pass the knight and gain the court-yard.

"And hast thou found thy tongue at last?" The page held down his head, and the cavalier, who had caught his arm, felt him trembling like an aspen.

"Come, I am not here to betray thy secret; but to mask thy sex or simulate the infirmity of dumbness is useless. Speak to me; I will not harm thee, fair one."

"Now, saints preserve me!" ejaculated the terrified girl. "Noble knight, as thou art a Christian and a soldier, permit me to return. Thou hast made concealment impossible; I am, indeed, a woman, and, alas! a helpless and unhappy one."

"Stay; I have much to ask thee."

"Oh! no, no, Sir Knight; were I found in this place at such an hour, my fair fame were for ever blasted, and 't is all, alas! poor Florence has to boast."

"Lady, I would not, by my soul's hopes, offer thee the slightest insult; accident has betrayed thy sex, but thou couldst not have concealed it longer: I would speak to thee — ask thee who thou art — and tell thee, Florence, more than I should in honour; for alas! I dare not own I love thee."

"Oh, oh! 't were wrong for you to speak, or me to hear it. Thou art a noble knight, and I a forlorn and friendless orphan, — and 't were madness to speak with one upon whom rank has precluded thee from bestowing aught beyond pity and compassion;" and Montravers felt the tears falling on his hands, while, convulsed with grief, every limb quivered with emotion.

"Florence!" said the knight, tenderly, "I must not, dare not tell thee what I feel. Had my possessions been but left me, I might have forgotten all but thy beauty, and taken thee from the world, and sacrificed rank and family, for love. But 't is a wild dream. Thou, haply, lov'st some kindred heart — and with one in humbler sphere, thou wilt know that peaceful happiness which I am never destined to enjoy: and yet, wilt thou think

of me at times — and when thou seest this little token, remember the poor knight who placed it here?"

The page sobbed convulsively — gently she would have declined the ring, which the cavalier had drawn upon her finger — "Oh, no! Sir Knight, I dare not take it — and yet I would give more than I dare tell to keep this token."

"Wouldst thou, indeed, my pretty one? — And wouldst thou give me aught in return?"

"I would. Had I the wealth men say is found in Indian lands, I would give it freely!"

"Florence — dear Florence! — art thou, in truth, anxious to retain it?"

"Oh! ask me not, noble knight! Thou wouldst seek from me a confession which would only tell my madness."

"And, by the Queen of Heaven! I never felt my poverty till now!" exclaimed Montravers, passionately. Were I to take thee from this tower, couldst thou share want and hardship with me?"

"I could follow thee on foot, were it all over the world; but thou wilt laugh at my simplicity."

"Laugh at thee! Florence, couldst thou read my heart — I love thee as I never loved before. Wilt thou join my wandering fortunes? — wilt thou fly with me?"

A burst of tears was the only answer, and the once haughty companion of Essex caught the gentle page to his bosom, and, as he pressed his lips to hers, plighted his faith, and, in return, received her artless assurances of romantic love. She still was in his arms — her head resting on his breast — her hand clasped fondly within his, when a step was heard beside them, and again the well-known voice of Hubert made the page bound like a startled deer from the knight's embrace.

There seemed a flush of anger on the squire's brow, as he coldly apologized for his intrusion. "But in good sooth," he added, "he little thought to find his master in the forest, and with such rare company at midnight."

"Hubert, you presume too much," said the knight, as his eyes flashed anger.

"Possibly I do — but from my fellow I may inquire the cause of his late visit to the green wood — haply a brother lackey could assist him better than his master."

The cold irony with which the squire alluded to the lowly situation of his humble love, galled the proud knight to the quick — but Florence appeared to have recovered her self-possession, and was by no means inclined to brook the esquire's impertinence.

"I will tell thee the only way your services can speed me," she said, with a spirit that surprised her lover. "My lady has lost the postern key — and, fearing the displeasure of the Ban Oussel, she sent me here to find it. The knight, by accident, found me engaged in seeking it; and now, Sir Squire, thy question is answered."

"And, Sir Page, under favour, if I may call thee *sir*, thy task was needless — thy lady left it in the lock, and, lest some other hand should take it, I secured it for her."

The page snatched the key impatiently, pressed the knight's hand unseen, and bounding across the plank, told them to close the spring-lock after them, and disappeared.

"'Tis a strange youth," said the esquire, "I have seen women, ere now, less fair and feminine. Hast thou ever, honoured sir, read of ladies following a knight's fortunes under the guise of cap and doublet?"

"Pshaw! such tales are in romances," said the knight.

"Well, heaven pity my simplicity! when I saw him seeking for the lost

key, I half believed this idle coinage of romance, and thought the page would prove a woman in the end; and, when we left this tower, would haply form a new addition to our company."

"What wouldst thou hint at?" said the knight, while his cheeks were red with fury.

"Nothing," said Hubert, with provoking calmness, "but that the bird will quit the cage in which it finds itself mewed up too long — and that more extraordinary events have come round, than that my lady's page became my good lord's light o' love."

"Now, by the Queen of Heaven! this insolence is intolerable. Have done, sir! — Count not thy services overmuch, nor think them such as will warrant this audacity; for —"

"Nay! pardon me, Sir Knight. I shall never speak again, even were the pretty page to drop the key to-morrow, and have to seek it, with thy good help, by moonlight, in the new —"

They entered the tower together. There, at the open casement, Fitzgerald was lingering; the moon streamed into the apartment, and the notes of a guitar at no great distance ceased as they came in.

"Ah! Ralph, why wert thou absent? Thou wouldst have heard the sweetest voice that ever breathed a love-song, and every cadence recalled fair Italy again — for there I first heard that voice and lute."

"Hark! 't is the Lady Inez," said the squire — "that music comes from her chamber."

"A shrewd guess," said Fitzgerald, with a smile. "Listen!"

As he spoke, a light and elegant symphony was played with excellent skill, and a voice of uncommon sweetness sung the following words:

THE VIRGINIA VOYAGER TO HIS MISTRESS.

Is lover's tear so insincere?
Are lover's oaths so soon forgot?
Is lover's pain all false and vain?
No! Lady, I 'll "forget thee not!"

'T is calm at sea — and now to thee,
To all that 's dear I speed in thought;
But e'en the storm shall shape its form
To whisperings of "forget me not!"

The North's cold star has faded far,
And stranger-planets gild my cot —
But, lady dear, a hemisphere
Shall change, and I "forget thee not!"

Soon wandering o'er a western shore,
Or weal or wo may be my lot —
But worlds may burn, and systems turn
Yet, Lady, I 'll "forget thee not!"

The voice ceased, the symphony was played again, and the last stanza thus repeated:

But worlds may burn, and systems turn,
Yet, *Gerald*, I 'll "forget thee not!"

The tall knight, as he heard the stanza, leaned from the window to catch the last breathings of the melody. "Good night, my best-loved Inez!" he softly whispered to the form that leaned from the casement above him. — "Good night, my Gerald!" a gentle voice returned; and next moment the lattice was heard to close, intimating that the singer had retired for the night.

"Well! who would believe that the Dark Lady's tower, which men once fancied was little better than an outlaw's keep, where life was nothing valued, and magic and necromancy far oftener practised than prayer and fasting, was now transformed to the dwelling of a troubadour! Walk but in the forest, you encounter some stately knight, swearing eternal adoration upon my lady's hand! Seek but the postern at midnight, and there a new gallant is making search for a missing key, with a page of matchless beauty! And, if you gain the tower, instead of the warder's hoarse challenge, a voice of exquisite melody breathes a "good night!" that would melt a stone! Heaven forefend that the Dark Lady, on her return, do not bring this romancing to a close, and that sighing of a different sort shall not succeed our present pastime!"

"Heaven grant it does not!" said Fitzgerald—"and now to bed."

"Not till we discuss a flask or two," said Montravers. "Come, sir squire! be but as active as we found thee in the forest — where, God's truth! thy absence would have been desirable."

Hubert smiled, rose, placed cups and flagons on the board, and then threw himself upon a bench, and was speedily asleep upon his hard couch.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MORNING of unusual mildness for this wild and stormy coast to witness dawned. By times, both the knights had left their chamber for the hall, and their strange esquire again asked and obtained permission to absent himself for the forenoon.

It may be conjectured that the lovers met again. The forest walks heard their vows repeated; and, while Inez and her noble lover wisely decided on never separating, the master of horse as prudently determined that the pretty page should share his broken fortunes, and quit the castle for the altar. In such discourse the morning hours flew rapidly; and it was not till, through a vista in the wood, a galley was seen standing in from sea under a press of canvass, with "the flying horse" expanded to the breeze, that the approach of the Dark Lady ended the forest interview.

Fitzgerald and his companion were, as in breeding bound, waiting at the rude pier to assist the Ban Oussel to leave the barge. This attention probably pleased her. She inquired hospitably if all had been as ordered for their entertainment. And, whether the result of her voyage had been satisfactory, or that she felt gratified at the respectful attentions of the noble strangers, the cavaliers remarked that her accustomed stern and masculine bearing had assumed a courteous form, and that some traits of womanly beauty replaced the harsh and haughty character for which the Dark Lady of Doona was distinguished.

"I fear," she said, "you have been but poorly treated in my absence. Have ye spent the day in wood and wild?" The knights smiled, as they told her they had been chiefly in the forest while she was away.

"'T is charitable to give our hounds and horses some breathing, for I have but little time for chase or pastime. I know not the time I held a stag at bay; and, though falconers say my island hawks are equal to any that ever stretched a wing, I have not seen a flight these six months."

They had now reached the tower; and, at the castle hall, the Lady Grace apologized for leaving them for a season. She had some important packets to reply to; and having signified that her grandchild, the Lady Inez, would honour the table that evening, she courteously took leave, recommending a ride in the forest, to give an appetite for her poor cheer.

The day wore on; the bell sounded from the tower; and the hour when

Inez and her faithful knight were to meet beneath the dreaded observation of the Dark Lady of the castle came. The evening had set in; and a flood of light poured from the narrow casements of the festal hall, and told that the banquet was in progress. With a beating heart, the fair girl waited the summons from her grand-dame; and, in a few minutes, a seneschal respectfully announced that the lady and her guests were already assembled in the lower chamber. Trembling with apprehension, Inez descended to the hall; and, as she entered the apartment, the page, unseen, pressed her hand, and, by a mute but significant sign, endeavoured to reassure her.

The Dark Lady occupied the centre of the board; and the knights were standing, courteously awaiting the presence of the expected fair one, as, covered with blushes, which her stern relative ascribed to a very different cause, she approached the place of honour which the lady of the feast had assigned to her.

"Come, Inez, sit thou beside this noble gentleman — our poor collation waits."

Instantly the tall knight sprang forward, and taking the hand of the fair guest, led her to her seat, and occupied the place beside her. The feast was served; it was profuse and splendid. The Dark Lady appeared unusually condescending, and did the honours of her table bravely; and while with evident pleasure she received the marked courtesy of both the strangers, she looked with a mother's pride at the beautiful girl, whose confusion heightened her natural charms, already adorned with courtly dress and sparkling jewels. Perhaps it was early recollections that touched the lady's heart; but certainly she appeared to have discarded her gloomy and repulsive bearing, and to feel more womanly than her stern nature usually permitted her. Meanwhile, the banquet proceeded. The pipes were heard without; mirth and jollity banished care within. Her martial guests praised their good cheer; and as they spoke of the day's pastime, in gallant terms expressed their thanks for the Dark Lady's hospitality, and pledged her deeply in Bourdeaux wine. Hubert waited the orders of his masters, and Worowski, seated apart, silently enjoyed the viands sent him by the orders of his gracious mistress; while the pretty page, standing behind the chair of honour, ministered to her stern lady, or handed the wine cup to the knights at her frequent bidding.

The feast ended; and the viands gave place to wine and minstrelsy. The old minstrel took the harp; — he sang a wild legend of some martial deed performed by the lady's father; but age had rendered his voice powerless, his fingers weak; and the praise bestowed upon his performance, when it ended, was rather the meed of pity for his years, than applause elicited by his defective skill. Just then a feeble blast was heard upon the gate horn; and, in a few minutes, the warder, with a low obeisance, announced that "a travel-worn man, accompanied by a strolling harper, begged a night's lodging from the Dark Lady of Doona."

"Are they unattended, Dermot?"

"They are, noble dame. They come hither on a pilgrimage to the blessed well of Bunmore; but night, and the old man's weariness, prevented them from going farther."

"Admit them — give them refreshment quickly — let the aged traveller have a place to repose in; and then conduct the harper hither, when he is sufficiently refreshed; and we will then, Sir Knights, judge whether his journey to the holy well," — and she crossed herself — "be not fitting penance for ill performance. Come, noble sir," she continued, addressing the shorter stranger, "I hear Inez prattling to thy friend about the land in which she once resided. Has he visited fair Italy? Come, — a cup of wine, page. Nay, thy own squire will serve it better; for, by the mass! your stripling's hand shook as he gave the flagon, until I feared sadly lest the

nose and doublet should suffer." And her eye glanced upon the page, whose burning cheeks betrayed too well that the lady's reproof was heard.

The knight bowed low, and pledged the lady. "My brother," he replied, "for years has been a traveller. He was upon the Cadiz trip with the gallant Essex;" and as he named the ill-fated favourite, his colour rose, while a deep sigh escaped him.

"He was indeed a noble gentleman," rejoined the dame: "I knew and regarded him well;—but soft! who have we here? A gleeman?—No, by our Lady!—the man looks more like a stout kinnahan than a rambling harper;" and her dark eye turned on the wandering bard.

"Methinks I have seen thee ere now," she said. "Hast thou been in our castle before?"

"I have," he answered—"thy roof has sheltered me—and I have received, ere now, a bounteous guerdon from thee, noble lady."

"By the mass! I marvel at it much then, for seldom have I wasted time or money upon wanderers of thy calling. But we would hear thee play."

The minstrel bowed with respectful deference to the lady of the castle, and threw a searching look around the table, scrutinizing with a glance each person as he scanned the company. His appearance was that of a man not yet past thirty, and his dress and bearing bespoke the soldier, rather than the bard. His green jerkin fitted closely to his shape, and his hose and buskins were better adapted to one who was a military rider, than a minstrel and wanderer by profession. In his buff-belt a stout double-edged falchion was suspended, and, on the opposite side appeared a dagger of good workmanship and foreign make. The harp-key hung beside it—and a once gay cap and plume completed the costume of the soldier-bard. Placing himself upon the seat assigned to him by the seneschal, he drank the wine the page presented; and having adjusted a few strings and satisfied himself that the tuning of the instrument was perfect, he leaned over the harp, and, while one hand mechanically touched the wires, seemed absorbed in thought and waiting some harmonic impulse, before he commenced his song. Suddenly the fitful hour of fancy came, and he raised his head slowly. In a few brief moments his countenance had undergone a fearful change—every line and feature was convulsed with grief—his look was turned to the ceiling—his attitude like one "crazed with care or crossed in hopeless love," as he played over a wild and mournful symphony, and with a voice of much power, which seemed, however, impaired by mental emotion, he sang the following

BALLAD.*

"The stag will rest the foray o'er,
And sun himself upon the mountain—
The seal will bask along the shore—
The hind repose beside the fountain—

The soldier, when the battle 's done,
Will dream upon his grassy pillow—
The seaman, when the port is won,
Laughs at the dangers of the billow.

But slighted love, with harpy fang
Consigns the heart to hopeless sorrow—
A lasting grief—a withering pang—
An endless night without a morrow.

The troubled wave of ocean sleeps—
The hottest field with evening closes—
But love betrayed for ever weeps,
And only in the grave reposes."

* From the Irish.

As the song ended, with the last chord of the symphony, the bard's head drooped upon the harp again. Inez and the knight witnessed this deep emotion, and, with praises of his minstrelsy, endeavoured to divert his grief. The Dark Lady sent him a cup of wine, and as the page presented it, the lesser knight rallied the minstrel playfully.

"Now, out upon thee for a dreamer! thou art but an unworthy member of the gay profession. What boots thy sweet voice and master's finger, if thine own music will not cure thy melancholy. By the mass! one would fancy thou wanted heart's-ease. Hast thou ever loved?"

The minstrel started from his dream — he threw a wild and threatening glance at the inquirer, whose cheek flushed in return.

"*Loved*, boy!" he exclaimed, — "Aye, loved too well — too faithfully — *loved!* Would I had never! — and then false Marian, thou hadst not seared my brain and racked my bosom."

"Was thy love false, then?" said the taller knight.

"Never was woman more so."

"Was she fair too?"

"O God! her falsehood was almost equalled by her beauty; and, as if unconscious of the presence in which he was, he thus continued — "*Fair* — Marian! I have seen the village maid, Marian, — I have watched the courtly dame, I have sought beauty in the cottage and the castle; and in the fairest face I met, I only traced a resemblance of thee."

"Was she indeed so lovely?" said Inez. The tone of the lady's voice appeared to rouse the minstrel from his gloomy reverie; he raised his eyes; and a countenance as beautiful as compassionate was turned toward his. Grief seemed to give way before woman's sympathy. He swept the strings again, — and bending a look on Inez, which covered her cheeks with blushes, he thus accompanied the harp —

"Such was the eye that won my love,
And thrilled me with its very glance;
And such the form that once could move;
The voice could charm, the smile entrance.

I view thee, fairest, and I sigh,
Thou look'st so like what once was mine;
Her red, red lip and sparkling eye,
And voice and smile were just like thine.

She 's gone — inconstant as the wind
That wantons with the summer flower;
She 's gone — but madness stays behind,
And heartless home and joyless bower.

A fading eye, a powerless hand,
When o'er the strings it fain would stray;
Deserted steed, and idle brand,
All tell me that my love 's away."*

The melancholy cadence died upon the harp, and the minstrel pushed the instrument away. The skill with which he touched the chords, and the full and powerful tones with which he sang the melody, produced a murmur of applause succeeded by a momentary silence. The Dark Lady first broke it; she called the seneschal, and inquired hastily who "the tall stranger was who stood within the door of the hall, and appeared indecisive as to whether he should enter or retire. Quickly the minstrel looked up. "It is my father, honoured dame; might the old man, who loves the harp dearly, venture into your presence?"

"Assuredly," said the lady graciously; "place him beside the fool yonder; — Worowski, share thy bench with the traveller." The bard leaped from his seat — his eyes lightened — he cast a fierce look around

* From the Irish

him — while the lady and the knights interchanged glances of surprise. — "By the fool!" — exclaimed the minstrel — "*He — by the fool!*" — "And fitting place, my son," returned the old man, as he entered the hall; and after bowing respectfully to the Dark Lady and the guests, quietly took possession of the place assigned him beside the ommadawn.

The figure and air of the bard's companion were very remarkable; his beard and hair were covered with the snows of time; and yet his eye lacked the blue and lustreless tint that distinguishes age, although the brow that shaded it was that of a man of eighty summers. Nor did his step betoken the weariness of which he had recently complained. Besides the middoge, he had no weapon that was visible; his garments were such as the humblest yeoman wore, and his cloak was the produce of a country-loom; and yet there was something in his air and bearing that betrayed him to be no common wanderer. Perceiving the eyes of the lady and her guests were turned upon him, he meekly directed his look towards the ground, and in a broken voice inquired of the honourable dame, "If his son should play another romance?" Apparently, the lady had not heard his request, for she beckoned with her finger to the ommadawn, who approached; and after receiving a brief communication, bowed his head, and again took up his place beside the wood fire.

The tall knight and the fair Inez, interested in deep conversation, seemed to take little interest in the passing scene, while the lesser gallant addressed his converse to the lady of the castle. They spoke of foreign wars, and domestic politics. "Would that we had some tidings here," she said, "for in this our remote dwelling, the world changes, and we know not what has happened, aye, sometimes for a twelvemonth after. — Old man," she continued, addressing herself to the stranger, who had just received a full cup from his companion by the fire; "hast thou travelled northward lately? and canst thou give us any tidings how the Earl of Tyrone and the Lord Mountjoy are likely to end their struggle?" The old man slightly shuddered, but, finishing the cup to the very bottom, he answered with apparent composure, "that he had come from the south, but as he passed through Galway, it was said that the O'Neal had met reverses, and that, for a time at least, his cause was not likely to succeed."

"*For a time*," cried the tall stranger, as he turned from the fair girl he conversed with, roused by the passing observation of the traveller; — "for ever, I would hope; what chance should attend the murderer, but foul and evil fortune?" The minstrel leaped from his seat, but one word from his aged companion appeared to quiet him, and he sank upon the bench again. "I know not," said the senior, "aught of the earl, but by report. Men accuse him of crimes, which others assert to be unfounded. That he has suffered reverses, is true, but time may repair them; and the same bold heart, that for many a year enabled him to defy his numerous foes, may yet raise the fallen banner of the chieftain; but why brand him murderer? He took deep revenge, and so have others." His eye accidentally fell upon the Dark Lady's; she started as if a serpent stung her, and darted a look in return at the aged stranger, in which rage and suspicion blended. Her lips grew livid, but the minstrel, with one wild sweep at the moment, struck the harp-strings, and with uncommon pathos, sung what appeared an extemporary lay.

The song is hushed in Bala's hall,
The bacon's cold upon the steep,
The steed has left the empty stall,
The banner's sunk upon the keep;
The knight upon Lough Neagh's shore,
Has laid aside the glittering steel:
And minstrel strikes the harp no more,
To tell the triumphs of O'Neal.

The melody ceased; — no applause followed the lay, while the lesser knight, with flashing eyes, exclaimed, "And such be even the traitor's fate. Had the martyred Essex not been deluded by the artifices of the specious villain, his enemies at the English court had never worked his ruin. Curses pursue him! that brought the noblest head in Britain to the block. I would I could confront the dastard, and if hand and steel failed not, the earth would not be longer cumbered with a matchless villain."

As the young knight spoke, the bard seemed burning with rage almost beyond control, but again the elder stranger interfered, and checked its outbreakings. "It is late," he said, "my son, and, *Emmeein*,* the noble dame will haply permit us to retire;" he rose, emptied the cup, and bowed formally to the lady. The minstrel paused, but suddenly seized the harp again. "One passing verse," he muttered, "ere I go." The air was similar to the last, but the accompaniment, no longer melancholy and desponding, was wild, martial, and irregular.

The day will come — the day will come —
When vengeance, bursting from her trance,
Shall sound the trump, and strike the drum,
And point the gun, and couch the lance! —
While from hill-top and woodland den,
The smothered war-cry loud shall peal —
And gray morass, and mountain glen,
Echo the triumphs of O'Neal!

Springing from his chair, the minstrel grasped his harp, and, with a cold obeisance to the Dark Lady, and a glance of defiance at the knight, followed the elder traveller from the banquet-room.

"Now, what think ye, sirs — is not this knave of the harp a person of some small presumption, to beard me and my honoured visiters in the castle-hall of Doona? Now, by our Lady! I think a night in the dungeon of the keep might cool the gleeman's blood, and teach the fellow that he must not bandy words with knights, as if he ruffled with horse-boys in a guard-room — how say ye, gentlemen?"

"Nay, noble dame," replied Montravers, "he is utterly beneath our notice; and these minstrels are spoiled by the over-freedom their art permits them to use with their superiors. — Certes, the knave has strong assurance too — and his companion — I doubt the tale, that they are so closely related as he tells us."

"And so do I," replied the Ban Oussel; "but we will know more before they leave the castle:" and, signing to the page, she made a communication, to which he bowed, and left the hall. He was not many minutes absent, and returned accompanied by an under-warden. To this functionary the Dark Lady intimated her pleasure, that the minstrel and his comrade should be lodged within the gate-tower.

"Dost thou mean, noble dame, those men who came hither after nightfall?"

"The same, Dermot."

"They have but just departed. They told us at the gate, that, as the castle was crowded with visiters, they would lodge at the village with the fishermen.

"Now this looks strange," she whispered to Montravers. — "After them, knave, and bring them back — they can but have proceeded scarce a bow-shot from the gate."

This incident for a short time interrupted the revelry; and in an hour, when the warden returned, and reported that he had carefully scoured the forest in various directions with thirty men, and yet no trace of these de-

* *Anglice*, Edward.

parted visiters could be found, — the lady rose, begged permission to retire, and, accompanied by the heiress of Doona, left the cavaliers to themselves. Instantly Hubert, who had attended to the occurrence with evident interest, quitted the chamber.

"Events come fast upon each other in this good lady's dwelling, Ralph. — Come, pass the wine." The knights fell into conversation — the night wore on — and they were about to leave the hall for their sleeping-place, when the page, attended by the seneschal with a torch, entered, and signified to the tall knight, that the Ban Oussel desired a conference with him in her private chamber.

CHAPTER XVII.

When Fitzgerald entered the apartment of the Dark Lady, he found her seated in the ancient chair, with one foot upon a hassock which the page placed for her convenience, and her arm resting on a small tripod table, on which lay papers and sealed packets, writing materials, and the silver bell, with which she summoned attendance when required. Whatever occasioned the interview, the knight suspected it was something of no ordinary import, both from the late hour appointed for the conference, and the care that was visible on the countenance of the Ban Oussel Dhu. The page, at the signal of her mistress, having accommodated the stranger with a seat, trimmed the wood fire, adjusted the tapers, and immediately afterwards left them together. While this was going on, the knight had surveyed the chamber rapidly; and its strange and anomalous furniture and ornaments were not unnoticed. Turning over some packets, the lady arranged them hastily, and then directing her dark eyes upon Fitzgerald, she opened the conversation by a slight allusion to the disappearance of the harper and his comrade; and then proceeded with some general observations on the threatening state of Ireland at the time, and the political insecurity of parties, which, she remarked, made it a difficult task to steer safely without getting committed too deeply, and risking shipwreck with the failing side.

"To her remarks the tall knight generally assented, and spoke on public affairs in a clear and sensible manner, that not only coincided with the lady's own views, but raised him in her own estimation.

"I have desired this private conference with you, noble sir," she continued, "for no trifling purpose, as you may well suppose; and although we are but recently acquainted, circumstances, and the urgency of the times, have determined me to waive useless ceremony, which now indeed one lacks leisure to indulge in. You know enough of me to be apprized that mine has been a bustling and adventurous life; and that our good queen, whom God protect! had never more enemies to resist, more difficulties to overcome, than the mistress of this poor house. How I have succeeded, an extended territory, and undisputed line of sea-coast, will best tell. But sir, I wax old; — after all, I am but a woman; and times may come when I may have occasion for muscular energy, and that too, when mortal infirmity would demand repose, rather than require exertion. I have no male successor. A weak and nerveless girl, when I quit this world, will be called on to hold acquired and paternal possessions, which I have found it difficult enough to retain. What then will happen? She will be harassed, plundered, stripped of all that I by a life of danger and difficulty achieved. I must remedy this while I live — I must mate Inez with some consort able to protect her rights; — and it is upon this point I have requested some converse with you."

The knight started — he saw the tendency of the interview, and dreaded that a knowledge of his actual circumstances, under the displeasure of the queen, and liable to the penalties of outlawry, would now prove a barrier to every hope of wedding Inez de Burgo.

"I am not," continued the Dark Lady, "a person who tells her purpose half, or reaches it by devious and cautious advances. — No, Sir Knight, I shall be candid and prompt. I have seen thee but a short time; and yet I think thou wouldst be a person likely to hold thy own, and protect the feeble heiress of my name, from those who would spoil her were she left defenceless. In a word, if thou wilt wed Inez de Burgo, thou hast her grand-dame's license; and when the gray stone covers her, in the place where the only being she loved is resting, thou shalt heir her lands, and win a nobler dowry than ever Irish bride brought to her lord before. Thou knowest my mind; and now, Sir Knight, your answer candidly."

"Lady," replied Fitzgerald, "I want words to express fitly how much I am indebted for the good opinion I have unmeritedly gained. If wealth, and power, and lineage could make a bride desirable, thou hast offered them; and when the lady's beauty is considered, a prince himself might be proud of the prospect you hold out. But, honoured dame, there are some matters of which I would apprize thee, and which, if unexplained, would be unworthy of my knighthood. Lady, I have imposed a story on thee which is not true — I am not a soldier of the queen's, nor I am bound to Galway. My companion is not a brother, save in affection. I am a friendless — a —"

"Hush!" said the dame, with a smile, "I suspected all this before. Am I not content with thee as thou art? and wherefore, if thou likest the offer, hesitate to become our relative?"

"But the Lady Inez," said the knight.

"Leave me to break my purpose to her, and I doubt little but thou wilt find her favourable to thy overtures," replied the dame.

"Then, noble lady, thou art content to take me for thy grandchild's husband, although I apprize thee honestly that I am other that I appear?"

"I am," replied the Ban Oussel.

"Then, if thy fair heiress will but listen favourably to my suit, noble lady! I shall be to thee, in all honour, a faithful and devoted son."

The customary hard and unfeeling bearing of the dame appeared thawed by the fervour with which the knight expressed his acquiescence to her overtures; and, when he knelt at her feet and kissed her hand, she seemed visibly affected, and turned aside to hide her emotions even from her future relative.

"Enough — What shall I term thee?"

"Gerald," replied the knight.

"Then, Gerald, wilt thou answer me one question, — Who is this squire of thine? There is a mystery about the man that somewhat puzzles me."

"Lady, I know nothing of him more than that he was our conductor to this castle, and the master of the galley in which we reached this coast."

"Ho, ho!" she said, as her brow darkened. "Knowst thou, then, whothy good squire is, friend Gerald?"

"No, on my soul! not more than I have already told thee — and, did I, dame, I would not speak it to his prejudice, for do I not owe my residence in thy castle — aye, and the prospect too I have of becoming thy relative, to his introduction?"

"I will but ask thee, was his bark named the Jolly Tar?"

"I cannot deny it," said the knight.

"There is thy esquire! — the boldest rover of the many adventurers who keep these seas; aye, and sworn enemy to the queen. Why this Hubert, as thou call'st him — but he has other names beside — has long been the en-

voy between *the Red Hand* and the Spanish king, and has supplied arms and ammunition to the rebels when other agents dared not attempt a landing. All this I care for little — but I owe him repayment for an insult, which, but for thy intercession, he should account for dearly. Last spring my best galley chased his bark. I had ordered him to be brought in — for I had then private reasons for detaining him. Favoured by the breeze, she gained upon him fast, and he was too close in-shore to escape. My vessel laid his on board — and, instead of surrender, by our Lady! the bold knave attacked my crew, beat them to their own deck again, and, pulling my ensign from the staff, flung it scornfully in the ocean, and then pursued his voyage. So-ho! Sir Hubert, thou hadst paid the penalty now, for thy insolence to our cognizance, but that thou cam'st in better company than, as I suspect, thou generally consortest with."

"Then is our squire a noted personage," said Fitzgerald.

"He is said to be a brave and adventurous seaman, and one of ready wit and prompt hand. But let him waive meddling with 'the flying horse' too frequently, for, by the mass! when our blood was warm, had the same Hubert been found within these walls, he would have run sad risk of dangling above the gateway."

"I have experienced his good offices — and I rejoice that I have been of some service to him in return," said the knight. "And now, honoured lady, with your permission, I would retire. After your own fatigue to-day, methinks you too must lack repose."

"We do, indeed," returned the dame; "and now, farewell. Heaven bless thee! my son." The knight kissed her hand again, and left the chamber. Outside, a man bearing a torch waited to light him to the hall, where he found his companion in great impatience to learn the result of his midnight interview with the Dark Lady of Doona. As neither page, squire, nor seneschal, was there to prevent their conversing without reserve, the lesser knight listened to the tale of his companion with astonishment. — "And she has actually wooed thee for her grandchild! Well, did I not count thee fortunate from the very moment thy foot touched land? Thou wilt surmount thy troubles, and, doubtless, weather all; but I — well, I have the world open still; and, but for Florence —"

"Now, Montravers," said the taller knight, "dost thou mean to offend me? Have I betrayed aught which could lead thee to imagine that I would enjoy my good fortune selfishly. No, Ralph — we share it, or we both shall wander."

"And the poor page ——"

"Shall come to the altar with a nameless knight — aye, and on the same day that the Earl of Kildare weds the Lady Inez de Burgo."

Montravers embraced his friend — "I never doubted thee, Gerald; but what will the Dark Lady say to have her page stolen?"

"Nay, an' she parts her heiress freely — methinks she will not refuse the page to boot — but to bed, Ralph. Come, our parting-cup, and we 'll toast our pretty mistresses."

While the knights, as in duty bound, drank to their absent ladies, and spoke of their future fortunes unreservedly, the dark dame was too full of her new arrangements even to let the late hour prevent her from at once communicating this intended alliance to her grandchild. Accordingly, she touched the bell, and the page, in dishabille, answered it hastily. "Send thy lady hither," she said; and Florence flew to her companion with the order, marvelling what this little tete-a-tete would bring about. The Lady Inez, who had been preparing for her couch, in some alarm threw a mantle round her, and entering the Ban Oussel's chamber, found her occupying her accustomed place.

"I sent for thee, Inez, that I might remove some apprehension thou

seemest to entertain that we were going to match thee with the *Red Hand*. Thou wert averse, as I collected from thee, to such a proposal; and therefore we are happy to announce that this displeasing suit is over."

Inez expressed her gratitude. "I told thee, then, the cause that especially urged me to see thee mated before I was removed. The cause and wish remain; and I have taken some steps towards accomplishing my object."

A thrill of horror rushed through her grandchild's bosom; she feared the absence of yesterday had been occasioned by this design; and concluded that the purpose of the interview which the page apprized her had taken place between Fitzgerald and the Ban Oussel, was probably to dismiss him from the castle, before the arrival of the new suitor should make the presence of a stranger undesirable. While such vague fears agitated the trembling girl, her stern relation thus proceeded:—"Inez, I was, probably, in my late intentions relative to thy disposal more ambitious than I should have been. We count a royal lineage—and my views ever pointed to that result for thee; but that is over;—Tyrone is annihilated—and I have chased, like an idle dream, visions that for years I cherished, perhaps too dearly. An humbler fate, a lower rank is reserved for thee: still thou wilt be second to few,—for thou wilt be consort of the noblest earl in Britain."

The words were hardly spoken ere the colour of the fair listener faded. She became like one whose every hope was blighted; and, without attempting a reply, sank back upon the low seat, and with difficulty sustained herself from falling on the floor.

"Now, by the holy saints! this folly is ill-timed and unaccountable; what means the silly wench? Thou art told thy marriage with the *Red Hand* is at an end; and, forsooth, because thou wouldst be united to a noble gentleman, and become a countess, the tidings almost force thee into fainting! What, in the foul fiend's name, possesses thee, simple girl? I never traced signs of idiotcy about thee in thy infancy; and yet of late thy conduct would lead one to infer that thy understanding was not of the sharpest."

Whether her grand-dame's harsh and contemptuous manner roused her latent spirit, or that she found a determined opposition to her present intentions was imperative, Inez speedily recovered; and in a firm and resolved tone inquired, "Why her immediate marriage was necessary, and who the person was, to whom, without her own wishes being consulted, she was to be so unceremoniously united."

The dark dame coldly answered,—"To the necessity of matching thee with some one who can protect thee, hourly experience points; the person—thy consent once gained—I should not object to name."

"Nay, lady," returned Inez, "this is not to be borne; thou wouldst marry me to suit thy convenience—and when I consent to wed with a person unknown, and probably most objectionable, thou wilt then, it would appear, as reward for duty, honour me by acquainting me with his name."

The tone of voice, the flashing eye, which the stern lady's cold and ironical address had lighted up, appeared to strike her. She muttered, "There is some of our hot blood in her veins!" and in a calmer voice asked her objections to such a union as she had described.

"They are manifold, Lady. I would, were my affections disengaged, part with my liberty but to him with whom I conceived I had a reasonable prospect of being happy; but now that I have no heart to give, I would scorn to commit a perjury, by plighting at the altar a faith which was already sworn to another."

The Dark Lady sprang from her seat—she spurned the footstool violently; and while her very brow seemed swollen with rage and disappoint

ment, she asked, with ill-suppressed passion, "who the honourable personage might be, on whom her dutiful grandchild had disposed her hand, without deeming her consent of any value in the transfer?"

"Lady, you have driven me almost to madness, and I will end the matter briefly. You sent me early from your care, and placed me under the charge of one I had never seen before. I neither guessed your objects, nor had reason to believe, from your former inattention, that you would ever waste a thought upon what my future lot should be. Accident introduced me to a stranger, and circumstances, unnecessary to recount to thee, produced an intimacy that ended in our betrothment. You know the whole; and I would pray you to have pity on one, who, if she erred, erred unintentionally. Oh, that my beloved knight were —"

"*Not here*, I trust, for his own sake; for, by the mass! he would experience but a scurvy reception."

"Thou wouldst not injure him in thy own house, were he in thy power?" said Inez, with alarm.

"Why, not particularly. I would return him to the Continent again, with the first galley that sailed; and, in the interim, keep his warm blood from over-boiling by a judicious course of bread and water. In the dungeon, he might sing madrigals to thy beauty, wench! — aye, and write sonnets, too, an he had but light enough. And yet, I bethink me, the arrow-slit was somewhat enlarged since the Cataran was smothered there; — although I never thought the fellow died for lack of air, but always fancied he sped himself, to save us trouble and a yard or two of halter."

"And wouldst thou serve an unsuspecting stranger thus?" demanded Inez, in a tone that surprised her stern grand-dame.

"That doubt of thine I shall solve when I have thy suitor in my tower," said the Dark Lady calmly.

Inez sprang from her seat — her eyes flashed — her countenance bespoke fierce and calm determination. The Lady also rose — "Wilt thou be a countess, girl?" she inquired, in a low voice, that quivered with ill-subdued passion.

"I shall wed with my own consent, or *never*," was the reply.

"That forty-eight hours shall determine." The Dark Lady motioned her to withdraw; and two persons were most unnecessarily made unhappy for a time.

CHAPTER XVIII.

When Hubert presented himself at the gate, the sentinels, from the lateness of the hour, hesitated to permit his leaving the castle; but when he said his business was of moment, and that his lord would be deeply offended were he hindered in his mission, the wicket was unclosed, and the squire found himself at liberty in the forest.

Short as the delay in the hall and at the gate was, the objects of his search had vanished. Hubert bent ear to earth in vain, to listen for a footstep on the turf; and, but in the moonlit alleys, the wood was dark and impenetrable to the eye. Vexed at his failure, he had no course left but to return to the castle, or take chance of recovering the lost trace of the minstrel and his companion as he best might. Accordingly, he determined on the latter attempt, and after a momentary deliberation, plunged into a thick and tangled path, which the moon hid and revealed by turns.

The forest was profoundly still. A hare or rabbit, disturbed when feeding, occasionally crossed the path; and yet the noise it made, when pushing through the underwood, from the calmness of the night, more than

once caused Hubert's hand to touch the handle of his dagger. Following this wooded by-way, he had progressed some considerable distance from the castle, when a heavy breathing, as that of a man in pain, caused him at once to check his pace, and listen with anxious attention.

But the object that alarmed him was not long undiscovered. Leaning against an oak tree, a large and burly-looking churchman was apparently gasping for breath; and, from the cautious method he respired, it seemed that he was solicitous to conceal himself from some persons who were not far distant from the spot. Hubert recognised him instantly, and, stealing as near as the copse-wood would permit, he softly whispered, "Father — Father Dominic!"

"Holy virgin!" murmured the person thus addressed — "Who art thou?"

"Hush! — it is I — your own godson." The churchman crossed himself; while Hubert, disengaging himself from the underwood, in a low tone inquired the cause of the holy man's alarm.

Father Dominic appeared unable to articulate more than "The hollow yonder!" while an inclination of his thumb told the locality of the place he felt his tongue unable to describe. Hubert instantly, with necessary caution, advanced to the place the alarmed priest had pointed to. Directed by the sounds of some low voices, he gained an opening in the thicket, near which three men were standing; while, not far removed from them a band of some forty horsemen were seen in a moonlit opening, refreshing themselves upon the grass, while their steeds were picketed beside their riders. The noise occasioned by the chargers, as they occasionally trod upon the fallen leaves and branches beneath their feet, prevented Hubert's cautious approach from being noticed, and, hardly venturing to breathe, he overheard distinctly every syllable which the detached group beside him uttered. It was evident that they were the leaders of the more remote band, and that they had retired from their companions to hold a secret council.

"Are we alone?" said one of the three, as he leaned his back against a tree — "I would not that those fellows overheard our conversation."

"They are too weary to permit curiosity to tempt them from their supper; and none of them, were they so inclined, could approach without his advance being visible long before he could hear our converse," replied a short, stout man, in a horseman's cloak.

"Nothing but prompt and successful efforts can save us. Our route discovered — the governor ere this apprized of it — and men and horses so jaded and distressed, that even were we permitted to retreat without molestation, a farther march would be impossible. And where are we to go? The ocean before us — our enemies behind — any friends we could lately have reckoned on, fugitive and outlawed — and that vixen of Doona ready to confirm her peace with the Sasenach, by sending him our heads, if she thought the present would be but acceptable."

"And thou wert in the castle, then?" observed the short horseman.

"Yes — and might have discovered all we wanted but for the impatience of Emmeein there. By heaven! his temper is latterly so uncontrollable, that at times methinks his wits have wholly left him."

"And could I remain calm when that she-devil placed thee upon the fool's bench, and the English knight heaped every epithet of dishonour on thy name? Saint Patrick! I could have stabbed him in the hall, though my own life paid for it the next minute."

"Tush! 'tis folly," said the horsemen, "to chafe at insult when one cannot avenge it deep and instantly. But what is to be done? what route pursued? for I guess that, unless we obtain safety ere the sun rises, some

of our numerous enemies will discover our weakness and retreat, and then the game is over."

"I have already formed my plans," replied the leader. "There is still one chance left us — if we succeed, we achieve life and liberty — if we fail, we only meet the doom that else is inevitable."

"And is success probable?" said the horseman.

"Nothing more likely — with deep caution and desperate courage: without these the attempt were hopeless," replied the chief personage.

"Proceed — what is the proposed attempt?"

"To surprise the Castle of Doona," said the leader.

"Nay, the very thought is madness: what, with two-score worn-out riders, assail an almost impregnable stronghold, with that she-wolf in the den too! Noble O'Neal, this is absurd!"

"Patience, friend Red Hand," replied the chief; "thou must hear my reasons ere you reject my plan. The Ban Ossel has been induced to fancy that, instead of being in the green wood here, we are now upon the deep sea yonder; and to intercept us, every galley she can command is cruising in the track she thinks we are most likely to follow. There are not a dozen horsemen in the castle. The guard-room is deserted; and, except some old men and pretty girls, the tower has nothing in it so formidable as the Ban Dunagha herself."

"Count ye the English knights as nothing?" asked Emmecin.

"I count them as but two men — stout ones an you please it — add a squire and horse-boy, and you have the whole number of her allies."

"And what plan of attack would you adopt?" inquired the horseman.

"Surprise," returned the leader; "I have one among yonder riders, who knows the tower well. 'T is many a year since he left it. For some injury he betrayed the Macmahons to the Ban Dunagha; and now, in turn, he will betray the Dark Lady to us. There is a private and forgotten entrance to the castle. It was used only in time of siege, to communicate with the pier, and thus obtain supplies from seaward. It can only be entered at low water, as the tide fills and conceals the aperture in the rock, by which ingress is obtained. Well, through this our guide will lead a party, while I and others, under various pretexts, will gain admission within the walls to-morrow, and be ready to assist the attack from without when night comes and favours us."

"The plan is good," said the Red Hand; "and we are in a strait, whence nothing but instant action can deliver us. Well, noble Tyrone, if we succeed, what next?"

"Why, hold the castle till we see if any chance of an outbreak in Connaught or Ulster remains — or, wait for the long-promised succours from our Spanish ally, — and, when all fails, embark in the galleys we can keep in readiness, when the winds will soon waft us beyond danger and pursuit. With the Dark Woman's treasures we will live bravely on the Continent, and wait there patiently until we can again strike for the crown, which may yet reward past years of peril and defeat."

"They say the treasures in Doona are countless," said the Red Hand. "I lately thought that I should have been their possessor legally, with the Dark Lady's heiress; but Fortune foiled me at the nick, and this worthy dame used little ceremony in discarding my suit, and ending our secret treaty. But she may — she *shall* yet repent it!"

"But, hark! — what noise is that? A man's foot, by heaven! moving but a few yards from us!" and, unsheathing their swords, the speaker and his comrades commenced a diligent search among the copse-wood which surrounded the spot they occupied. Hubert's situation was, indeed, most perilous. A branch on which he leaned had broken, and, to prevent himself from falling, unfortunately occasioned the noise that alarmed the Red

Hand and his comrades. In breathless alarm, he cowered close to the tree beside which he had placed himself; while, within two paces, Tyrone stood, with his naked weapon, and listening with intense eagerness. Hubert, determined to make a bold effort for his life, was prepared, at O'Neal's next step, to stab him to the heart, and then trust to darkness and the forest for escape; but, at the instant, a horse was heard advancing at a rapid pace, and a new object occupied the attention of the party. Soon after, Hubert heard the Red Hand, who had been making an unsuccessful search in another direction, call to O'Neal that the scout had returned with important news, and again the party resumed their former position in the open glade.

"It was but a false alarm," said the stout horseman; and Hubert observed them immediately joined by a fourth man, who appeared breathless with haste, and the bearer of some momentous information.

"How now, Bryan," exclaimed the Red Hand; "thou art with us sooner than we expected. What tidings?"

The horseman replied — "I have ridden hard, in faith; for I left Carriga-howla at sunset. The lord deputy just before arrived at the town, with some dozen attendants, and comes on to-morrow to Doona, 't is said, on important business with the lady. A strong force is to follow him, and there is shrewd suspicion that nothing but the certainty of our noble leader being here would induce Sir Richard to quit the borders at this time."

"Our movements are betrayed!" said Tyrone, with a deep imprecation, "and we must be beforehand with my lord deputy, or we are lost. Ha! we have it! — Red Hand, we will waylay him! — seize his person, as a hostage for our own safety — and, should our plans touching Doona fail, obtain terms, by holding Bingham in our power. Know you the road he takes?"

"Yes," said the Red Hand. "He must come through the mountain-pass at Dhu Hill."

"Could he gain Doona by any other route?" inquired Tyrone.

"Impossible! 'T is the only road by which a horse can travel," replied the Red Hand.

"Is the place favourable for a surprise?" pursued the rebel earl.

"In the whole kingdom, were it searched from east to west, there is not a better place to form an ambush."

"Then, fortune, stand but our friend, and we may yet rise as we have often done, stronger from an overthrow!" Turning to the scout, Tyrone then inquired if the lord deputy would move betimes.

"That," said the rider, "I could not exactly learn; but, from his haste and secrecy, there is little doubt but he will leave Carriga-howla by sunrise."

"Then there is no time to lose; — up, Red Hand, collect thy band, and let us be moving. Emmeein, thou must leave the harp, and use the brand only, till times alter — go get our steed ready." As he spoke his companions left him; and, leaning his back against a tree, he muttered, in a low voice, "Ha! there is hope yet — and I may escape the fate that yesterday appeared inevitable. I must, however mask my purpose closely from my dupes, and specially from yonder madman of the harp, who dreams of nothing but serving yet a royal master — perish the bubble — a crown! — pshaw! — I followed that idle phantasy too long — but 't is over now — and thus for ever I abandon it. Short as my sojourn in yon tower was, it confirmed my resolution. How lovely that young beauty seemed — why 't would repay a lost kingdom but to gain her — aye, and she shall be mine. If we surprise the castle, — and the plan is feasible, — I 'll bear that fair girl off, and in another land enjoy myself in luxury and ease. But soft, here comes the Red Hand. Well, my brave kinsman, are we prepared to march?"

"All is ready," was the reply; "and another scout has brought us fresh intelligence. A horseman passed him in the forest at speed, bearing a message from the lord deputy to the Lady of Doona, announcing his intended visit."

"This is excellent, in faith — with fortune on our side, this will make Doona our own."

"How mean you, earl?" inquired his kinsman; "the coming of the lord deputy will surely increase the garrison."

"Aye, doubtless would it, did we but suffer him to reach his destination," replied O'Neal. "No, Red Hand, I have changed my plans; — no hostages — no prisoners — *no quarter!* We will then assume the arms and equipage of the dead enemy; and, unsuspected, after nightfall gain ready entrance at Doona, and, before a suspicion be created, there would be a surprised hold, and a slaughtered garrison."

"And will you not spare even the lord deputy?" asked the Red Hand.

"*I will spare none!*" was the cold and sanguinary answer. "Assist us, fortune, and at midnight to-morrow there will be wild work yonder in the Dark Woman's tower." He pointed to the spot where the castle of Doona stood, and, as he spoke, left the place in which he had held council with his followers. When the rebel was at a distance that admitted Hubert to quit his ambush in security, he stole from the copse, and sought the unhappy churchman.

Father Dominic appeared as if he was yet spell-bound. He occupied the precise position in which his companion had left him; and, as his godson approached, indicated, by his hard and laboured respiration, that he still remained under the influence of mortal terror. Nor could Hubert's assurances for a while remove his alarm. Slowly, however, he seemed to comprehend, that the dreaded band had moved from his immediate neighbourhood; and, in a paroxysm of piety for his deliverance, commenced a course of credos and jubilates that utterly prevented him from listening to the directions his hasty companion was labouring to make him understand. Losing patience, Hubert shook Father Dominic roughly by the shoulder. "Now confound thee, for a doting monk," he said; "is this a time for thy misplaced devotions? Nay, cease thy prayers, or, with one whistle, I will recall the Red Hand to profit by thy exercise, and leave thee with him to hear his shrift. Attend to me, monk — hasten to the castle."

"Alas! Hubert, I know not where it lies: fear has so confounded my memory, that, by the mass! I doubt if I could tell my own name!"

"I will direct thee to the path," said his godson. "Thou knowest the goatherd's cottage? — surely, thou hast not forgotten it; for many a time you listened to young Barbara's confession before the tall fisherman wedded her — as men say, sorely against thy reverend advice."

The monk muttered an affirmative.

"Then, come on — I will point it out. If ever you made speed, hasten to the castle: tell the Ban Ousel to send the English knights, with every horseman she can muster, without a moment's delay: tell the cavaliers to arm themselves well, and let them ride to the Pedler's Cairn, where I will meet them. Dost thou comprehend me yet?"

"Why, by mine order! hardly, Hubert. Thou wouldst have me go to the Pedler's Cairn, and send the Ban Ousel for the English knights," said the confused priest.

"Why, thou 'rt dreaming, monk. Nay, can you carry these tablets to the Lady? — Rouse thee, man!"

"I'll try," replied the churchman. Hubert hastily traced a few lines, folded the writing, and, leading the monk on, pointed the broad and open vista that led directly to the gates. The sight of the well-known road appeared to restore the priest's wandering recollection. He took the tablets

promised to deliver them, without delay, to the Dark Lady of Doona; and having turned his steps toward the castle, his impatient companion repeated his commands again, and then went off, in an opposite direction, at a rapid pace.

CHAPTER XIX.

The dawn was feebly breaking through the mountain mist, and the castle of Doona was perfectly quiet, when a faint note was heard upon the gate-horn; and while the warder still doubted whether some one demanded admission, a loud and well-sustained blast at once brought the porter to the shot-hole, and there, before the archway, stood a monk and a horseman. The stout substantial person of the castle confessor was easily recognised; and the rider wore the queen's uniform, with the lord deputy's cognizance emblazoned on his basnet.

"Open," said the well-known voice of Father Dominic; and, hanging his bridle on the stoccade without, the soldier followed the churchman, and found himself in the guard-room of the Dark Lady's hold!

Kind and courteous greeting passed between the priest and porter — a stoup of wine was forthwith produced from some concealment by the functionary of the gate. "Thou seem'st sorely fatigued, holy father — take a cup; it will cheer thee somewhat, before thou wouldst seek the repose of which you stand in need so marvellously."

Muttering a benedicite, the monk finished the draught, and then, pointing to the horseman, signed that he should be similarly accommodated. "Aye, and marry! welcome — my lord's livery were sufficient warrant for a cup of wine, e'en without my gossip, his reverence, bringing thee along with him, honest friend."

"Bryan," said the monk, "I must see the Lady instanter: I have urgent business — *Ora pro nobis Domina cali!* — and, heaven help me! I can scarcely remember it with fear."

"And," said the trooper, "give her that packet from my lord deputy, who will be here at sunset."

"Faith, these are brave times," replied the janitor; "seldom day passes, but we have unexpected guests — and some of them of the strangest too; but I will deliver thy packets and commands; and, if thou desirest to confer with the Ban Oussel, I will show thee the way, holy father."

"Heaven knows I do not," muttered the unhappy priest — "I would rather undergo another penance to the Reek, aye, or even to Lough Dergh, than meet her in my present state of fear and terror, — for the Dark Lady loves a short tale and clear statement; and never was sinner worse prepared for either than I; — but 't is a thing of life and death, and I must on." So saying, he fortified himself with a second stoup, and handing the flagon to his military companion, whom he had fortunately met in the forest, the porter led the way, and the monk followed.

When the Ban Oussel was aware that some one wished to speak with her, she flung her large mantle round her person, and presented herself to the priest and his conductor. — "Methinks," she said, "every knave and fool now selects the night for wayfaring. — How now, Sir Priest! was the day not long enough to afford thee time to reach Doona before the owls were on the wing?" Then turning to the porter, she demanded his message. Bryan delivered it promptly. "Ha! the lord deputy himself — there 's something more than meets the ear in this; haply the monk knows it; I guess as much, or he would not disturb us. — Hence," she said to the warder, "see the rider fitly entertained, and leave the holy father with me; for, doubtless, he has some important affair that requires our speedy

hearing." She beckoned the monk to enter; and as the door closed, in the dull light of morning, the unhappy priest found himself alone with a personage, whom, in his best-regulated moments, he always dreaded to encounter.

"Heaven guard thee, daughter!" he muttered, as his voice became hardly articulate with terror.

"Thou hast but just arrived?" said the lady with impatience, and heedless of the speaking benison.

"*Domine nos dilige*," replied the priest, happy to find words to form an apology for an answer.

"Truce with thy mummery — keep thy priestcraft for the guard-room; — what are thy commands? Speak, — quick!"

"I have been sorely frightened in the forest," the alarmed churchman with difficulty muttered.

"Now, holy saints! what meanst thou, monk? — Am I to be disturbed, to hear how a shaveling was startled by a scarecrow; art thou drunk or doting? — speak!"

"I fear I am bewitched," replied the priest, stammering.

Springing from her chair, while rage sparkled in her eyes, the Dark Lady seized the monk, and shook him by the collar violently. "Thou hast made too free with cup and flagon, dog priest! — What, in the devil's name, brought thee to our apartment?"

The unhappy churchman made a desperate effort. — "A message from Hubert, gracious dame."

"Out with it, in the foul fiend's name, then."

"He waits for you at the Pedler's Cairn; and if you love him, hasten without delay," gasped the monk convulsively.

"The fellow 's mad — drunk — deranged; — did he mean insult? by heaven! this middoge should search his frock:" — and she would have again seized him; but, happily bethinking himself, the monk produced the tablets. "There, lady, there, — read, and thou wilt know all."

Snatching them from his grasp, the Ban Oussel perused the scroll. "Ha! — this is of moment; — off to thy couch, thou dreaming owl!" and as the monk bustled from the chamber, the lady again read more leisurely the hasty writing. — "'The English knights are specially desired to hasten.' — I 'll to them — there is no time for ceremony."

Arranging her dress with more attention than she bestowed upon it when she honoured the churchman with his late interview, she descended the stairs, and tapped lightly at the chamber-door, where the strange cavaliers were sleeping.

Fitzgerald heard the summons, and demanded who knocked? "'T is I, the Lady Grace." Up sprang the knight. — "One moment, lady, while I throw my cloak around me;" and calling to his companion, he told him that the Ban Oussel was without. "Tell him to follow thee to my chamber, Gerald;" and leading the way, the tall knight entered the room he had quitted but a few hours before.

"There are two messengers arrived with curious tidings; — one to apprize us that the lord deputy is on his way to visit us ere sunset; the other hath reference to thyself. The monk who brought these tablets is utterly incompetent, from fear and wine, to give us any explanation. Read thou what is there contained, and tell us how thou wouldst recommend us to act."

The knight hastily perused the writing — "Lady, as I take it, 't is business of life and death. We must instantly set out for the place that Hubert has appointed."

"May there not be treachery intended to thee and thy companion?" asked the lady.

"Certainly not. I think this strange squire means us honestly all through; and he tells us to come armed, and with all the force we can immediately command. He knew well that we would have ridden in the forest to fly a hawk this morning; and if he had aught of evil design to execute, there he could have had us at advantage, and slightly armed and attended. No, honoured dame,—I think 't is something connected with yon minstrel and his fellow."

While he was yet speaking, Montravers entered. "Ralph, read this scroll over, and say what think ye of its purport?"

"That, as fast as horse can bear us, we should hasten to the Pedler's Cairn. Will the noble dame allow some riders to accompany us?" asked the lesser knight.

"Holy angels! was ever such unlucky chance!" exclaimed the Ban Oussel. "When before could this tower be found without a hundred horsemen? and now, an we muster a score, 't will be the utmost;—but we will, before many hours, have help enough." She seized the silver bell, and rang it loudly. Again the sound was repeated; and next moment the door was hastily thrown open, and Florence, undressed and wrapped in a loose mantle, rushed in; but when the knights were discovered, uttering a half-suppressed shriek, the alarmed page ran behind the lady's high-backed chair to hide her dishabille from the eyes of persons whom she little imagined would be found in such a place, and at such an hour.

"What means the silly boy? Think ye, Sir Page, these noble gentlemen will waste a look upon thy unhosed ankles? Go, tell the warder to fire the beacon, and ring the alarum, to rouse groom and rider.—Send Worowski hither. And now, gentlemen, dress and arm ye; and leave the rest to me.—Off, minion, and do my bidding."

"The page, with blushing cheeks, wrapped her mantle round her cautiously, and strove to steal unnoticed from the chamber; but, quickly as she passed, Montravers' eyes glanced on the statue-looking limbs that the scanty cloak but indifferently covered. "An they were chiselled," he muttered to Fitzgerald, "they could not be more beautiful." The remark, though made in a whisper, was overheard by the dark dame.

"Nay, Sir Knight," she observed jestingly, "if thou praisest the boy thus, thou wilt make the varlet vain; and, by our good Lady! 't is malapert enough. Hark! the bell rings;—and now the less time lost the better. Instantly the cavaliers left the room, and in a short time were arrayed in buff coats, with breast and back plates, the military undress of those martial times.

While examining their rapiers and fire-arms, the Dark Lady once more presented herself. She appeared anxious for a private conversation with the taller knight. His friend perceived how her wishes lay, and addressing his companion, said, "Gerald, receive the dame's directions, while I will be thy master of horse, see to our appointments, and get our riders into order in the court-yard."

"I would not desire a better and a braver," said Fitzgerald, with a smile.

"And if he be to thee but as faithful in thy hour of need, as he who served the gallant Essex," said the Dark Lady—Montravers started—"I will grant him the first boon he asks, were it my best galley or swiftest steed!"

"And thou wilt grant my first wish, then?" asked the cavalier, earnestly.

"Why, Gerald, I think I may safely make the promise; some thirty years ago I should have feared the knight designed something against our liberty, but as we are old enough to be his grand-dame, we will, trusting he holds no evil purposes touching our hand, venture to give our promise—

and yet many a widowed dame would not object to win so good a Castellan."

"Well, noble dame," exclaimed Montravers, "I will not only win the boon, but crave it too!" so saying, he left the hall.

"And now, gracious lady," said Fitzgerald, "ere I depart, may I ask, hast thou had any converse touching our suit with thy fair heiress?"

The question, whether that it was unexpected, or that to answer it was impolitic, appeared to confuse the lady sadly. The knight perceived her embarrassment, and added —

"I guess the truth — the fair damsel received thy intimation of a suitor with displeasure. — Nay, noble dame, I am neither discouraged, nor, in good sooth, much displeased."

"How, Sir Knight," replied the Ban Oussel sharply; "is then thy suit a matter of such indifference?" and the colour of her cheek rose.

Fitzgerald took her hand, pressed it to his lips respectfully, and thus continued: "Far from it, dame — and as thou art content that I should, on one subject, hide the truth, I will in return intrust thee with another secret. Lady, I have met thy grandchild in another clime. Ere I knew she was aught but Mabel Montagu, the dependant on the abbess of Saint Juliana, I won her heart and plighted her my faith. I have seen her in this castle — she only knows me as a proscribed and wandering knight, and little dreamed that the husband you proposed was the favoured lover she honoured with her preference."

While the knight's confession was making, the cloud, which a suspicion of indifference to the proposed alliance with her heiress had brought to the Dark Lady's brow, gradually cleared off, and when he confessed their attachment, a smile for a moment played over her stern countenance.

"Ha! lies the land thus?" she cried. "Aye, Lady Inez — and thy knight was in the tower while I hinted something of the keep and bread and water. Well, God's mercy! I love the wench the better for it. Why, Sir Knight, she bandied defiance to my threats — and, by the Virgin! I think would have held her determination stoutly. But, wilt thou but promise not to inform her that I am privy to thy loves? I owe her something for her lack of duty," and she smiled as the knight assented. "But, hark, the riders are mounting — I am half inclined to take my palfrey and see the issue."

"What! lady, and thy son in Doona! I would deserve to lose my spurs, to let thy honoured life be placed for a moment in jeopardy."

"Then go, Gerald!" She looked from the casement — reckoned the horsemen over — fifteen — twenty, only twenty-two."

"They are all good men and nobly mounted," said the knight.

"And will be true to thee, aye, even as thy master of horse yonder. By heaven! I look upon him with good pleasure — he seems as bold a youth as ever rode a charger."

"I must leave thee, lady — Poor Inez! thou wilt not be too hard upon her?"

"No, Gerald — were it but for thy own sake. The girl was right — I would have done — I *did do*, similarly. And now, my son, be not too forward — I would not lose thee — take care of thyself, for the green wood has cost me dear already."

She thought, probably, on her earlier loss, which the youthful appearance of the knight recalled forcibly; then leading the way, she accompanied the tall cavalier to the court-yard. There the small body of cavalry were already drawn up by Montravers; and Fitzgerald having mounted his favourite horse, the order to march was given, and, issuing through the archway, the riders at a round trot proceeded for the Pedler's Cairn.

"I have already sent for succours, should they be required," said the Lady

of Doona, "and ere the sun fades in the ocean, thou wilt have enough of stout retainers in the old tower to stand a siege or ride a foray. But thou listenest not — thy eyes are directed elsewhere — and, but my sight is failing, I would have sworn I saw a hand wave from the upper lattice of the tower. Away, my son, and holy angels guard thee!"

Fitzgerald gave the rein to his impatient charger, and, vanishing through the gateway, was soon alongside the master of horse, and at the head of their small but well appointed band.

CHAPTER XX.

Although no time had been lost at the castle of Doona, to use the military parlance of our own times, in "turning out the party," yet the morning was far advanced before the knights and their attendants came in sight of the place of meeting, that Hubert had appointed. The beauty of the romantic scene which surrounded them was unnoticed by the wild riders. The freshness of the green alleys — the forest and its stately trees, now lightly tinted with the sear of autumn; the boundless expanse of ocean to the west, and the huge chain of alpine heights that closed this extensive landscape eastward; while the dark tower of Doona rose above the wood, and formed a noble object in the distance: all this presented a natural picture of grand and savage beauty. As if to animate the scene, a herd of red deer, disturbed by the approach of the horsemen, broke from a thicket, and went off towards the mountains at full speed. But this glorious landscape was lost upon the knights. They pushed forward at a rapid pace, and through an open glade, directing their hurried march upon a pile of stones visible at some distance, and which was known to the peasantry by the name of the *Pedler's Cairn*. They reached the appointed rendezvous; and, dismounting from their horses, waited impatiently the appearance of their mysterious squire. The place they halted at was a collection of stones heaped together. These tumuli were, and, alas! are now, frequent in the wilder parts of Ireland; and were intended to mark the place, and preserve the recollection, of some deed of violence which had been transacted on the spot. The cairn where the horsemen dismounted was raised to commemorate the murder of a northern pedler; and though the savage act had been committed many a year before, still no peasant passed the cairn without adding another stone to the pile, and offering a hasty prayer for the soul's weal of the unhappy stranger. An adjacent thicket served to conceal the party; and before the lapse of an hour, Hubert, the expected person, issued from the opposite copsewood, and joined the knights.

"'Tis well, noble sirs, that you obeyed my request so speedily," said the squire. "Saint Patrick! how I feared that the monk's wits would desert him altogether! and till I saw the beacon flash upon the tower top I dreaded the fat sinner would never reach the castle with blood and brains sufficient to bear my message. And now, tighten girths, and loosen brands; for, before long, you will require neither to spare steel nor horseflesh."

"In what quarrel are we to engage, Sir Squire? and where lies th enemy?" said Fitzgerald.

"Both questions are simply answered. The quarrel is to rescue t lord deputy; — the enemy are now hidden in yonder dell you may perce at some half mile's distance to the left?"

"Who are they?" said Montravers — "are they Catarans or rebe

'Fore God! we thought the queen's majesty had none hardy enough in Connaught to dare to stop her representative."

"Thou shalt see that ere long; and as I perceive that there is a spare horse for me, I will mount and lead you by a small circuit where we shall be nearer the ambush of the enemy, and have better ground to charge over. Silence, my masters. Move as if every tree concealed a spy." And Hubert, mounting the spare charger, rode off to the right, and desiring the party to follow by single files, they became soon involved in a tangled path, which was at times extremely difficult to traverse. After about a mile's ride, they issued into an open glade. Hubert desired them to halt, and pointing out a level sward, disencumbered from underwood, and of the extent of several acres, told the leaders that this spot would be the scene of the approaching encounter.

All this to the English cavaliers appeared unaccountable. That the lord deputy should be attacked, and that they should be brought there to succour him, implied a knowledge on Hubert's part, which they had great difficulty in imagining how he could have honestly obtained. But farther, that he could not only foretell the approaching encounter, but select the very ground for it, was marvellous. The squire probably guessed the knight's thoughts, and aware that a thorough confidence was necessary to ensure success, he rode to the spot where his masters, with the principal of the lady's riders, were in consultation; and pointing to the copse he had already indicated from the Pedler's Cairn, as being the scene of ambush, he spoke thus:

"You marvel, no doubt, noble sirs, at the adventure of this morning, but it is simply explained. You might have remarked that when, last night, the minstrel and the stranger left Doona, so suddenly, I also quitted the castle — my suspicions had been excited, and I determined to watch their movements closely. There is no time for details — it is enough to tell you, that a strong band of Tyrone's northern rebels are now ambushed in yonder copse, and that their chief leader and his favourite companion, the minstrel, were, last night, in the castle-hall among the Dark Lady's company. Look forward. By yonder pass, Sir Richard Bingham, with but a slender escort, will shortly approach. There — in that spot, he will most probably be assailed; and, now, noble knights, my tale is told, and the rest I leave to you."

"So," said Fitzgerald, "we know our position. — Ralph, there are but two courses — one to unite ourselves with the lord deputy, the other to wait the attack upon him, and take the enemy in the rear. What is the deputy's force, Hubert?"

"The scout told the Red Hand it was but a dozen riders."

"And is my rival here? So-ho! Sir Red Hand, thou and I will run a charge, I trust. What say you, Ralph? — Speak, master of horse! shall we join Sir Richard at once, or wait till the knaves assail him?"

"Wait where we are, undoubtedly — we shall be fresh — the ground is favourable — our flanking movement will embarrass an enemy more than a front attack by twice our number — and we have the castle open to rétreat upon, and are near any succours that might haply reach us from Doona; and these the lady promised."

"The master is right," said Hubert, "here is the best point from which we can charge the rebels. You spoke of succours — how soon may they be expected?"

"That I cannot exactly say. She despatched Worowski long before we could get into saddle, to collect some retainers who were contiguous to this place," replied the lesser knight.

"And did the ommadawn know the place of rendezvous?" asked the squire.

"He did," returned the lady's principal rider. "He was sent to call out the Morans and Sweenies."

"Then he will be here immediately." As he spoke he turned into the copse, cut two hazel branches, and, having inserted one in the ground, and placing a smaller twig in a cleft, pointed it in a particular direction. Calling to a horseman, he made him observe the way the smaller wand turned, and then ordered him to ride back to the Pedler's Cairn, and fix the twigs in a spot, and direction, which he easily made the rider comprehend. "The ommadawn will understand my message, and those twigs will direct him hither, as truly as if the horseman waited for him — and we are too few, to spare even one of our good company."

"Hubert, thou art a strange fellow," said Fitzgerald, laughing. "Thou and thy friend have curious means of communicating purposes, and, by mine honour! for a professed fool, he shews less lack of wit than men who bear a graver reputation."

Meantime, the riders of the Dark Lady were busily engaged in arranging their horse-appointments, and preparing their fire-arms for the approaching contest. Hubert gradually drew himself apart from the rest, and, beckoning the knights to join him, he thus continued —

"You have done well, my masters, in attending to my request, and this day's work, if we but succeed and survive it, may do more for your shattered fortunes, than all the exertions of friends and kinsmen about the queen's person." Then, fixing his keen eye on both as he individually addressed them: "Lord Kildare, what would you do to remove attainder from thy earldom, and win thy broad lands back from the custody of the crown? — Ralph Montravers, and what wouldst thou, to abate thy outlawry and have those hundred crowns, at which thy head is valued, recalled?"

"Now, by heaven! thou art the veriest puzzle that man e'er met with, Hubert," said Fitzgerald: "thou hast our secrets — and, by mine honour, you seem determined to let us know occasionally, that the same has not slipped the memory; — but, your meaning?"

"Attend to me. — What would most pleasure Elizabeth of England, were she to choose from every gift a subject could offer? I'll tell thee; — her deadliest enemy dead or captive. Tyrone she hates above all her foes united — and Tyrone is hidden in yonder copse, and, before another hour passes, will be before you in his saddle."

Both knights started. "Art thou certain, Hubert, that the false villain is indeed there?" inquired Montravers, ardently.

"Most certain — I was within a shorter distance of him last night than that which divides you and me at present; and, after I despatched the monk to warn you to come hither, I tracked the rebel horsemen as faithfully as ever bloodhound followed the slot of deer, until I saw them sconce themselves in the underwood you see. There are some forty horsemen — O'Neal commands them — and he is attended by his kinsman the Red Hand, and his henchman and harper, Emmeein au Knock.* There is another in the band, whom I must specially attend to; but do you, noble

* Emmeein au Knock — Anglice, *Ned of the Hill.* The introduction of Emmeein au Knock is an anachronism, as he flourished at a later period, and during the reign of James the Second. He is described, in traditionary lore, as having been a stout soldier, and an excellent performer on the harp, and equally distinguished for his devoted attachment to a worthless king and faithless mistress. After James' final defeat, Emmeein au Knock retired into Connaught, and put himself at the head of a band of outlaws, and, as tradition avers, carried on the double profession of music and robbery for some years with uncommon success; until, at last, he was betrayed to the County Keeper, and ended his career, like many other gentlemen adventurers, upon the gibbet. Some poetical remains of this soldier-bard, addressed to his unworthy mistress, are still preserved. The poetry ascribed to him in the romance is imitated from the Irish and the 'Virgina Voyager's' from the pen of a fair relative of the author.

gentlemen, set on the rebel earl, and I will pledge my life that his head will remove outlawry and attainder, were your offences against the majesty of England tenfold deeper than they are."

"Hubert, we are thy debtors for life; — thy fortunes, if ours brighten, shall be carefully looked after," exclaimed Fitzgerald.

"No, my good lord — 't is not for future guerdon that I would do thee good service — but thou shalt know more anon," returned the squire.

"And now I bethink me, Hubert, the Dark Lady has discovered that you thrashed her galley soundly, and tumbled flag and flying horse into the sea, with as scanty ceremony as I would fling away an orange-peel."

"Nay, has she found out that I was unmannerly enough to object to the Jolly Tar exchanging owners — and that I demurred to quit the blue sea for black walls and bread and water?" said the squire, with a smile.

"All this she knows," returned Fitzgerald.

"And she shall know more before to-morrow dawns," rejoined Hubert; "aye, and matter which will surprise her deeper too; — but her retainers will marvel what we speak apart for — let us join them."

"One question only," said Montravers — "tell us the arms and figure of the rebel earl; — does he wear a conspicuous plume, or carry any badge or cognizance to distinguish him?"

"Far from it," replied the squire; "the traitor is as politic as bold; — he will not expose his person without good cause. Look for a leader's figure of large and muscular proportion — a dark but beardless face — and if he rides the best steed, and is foremost in the fray, on him gallantly, for thou wilt have Tyrone before thee, knight."

"Thanks, Hubert, — and the Red Hand, — describe him."

"Thou canst not doubt him for a moment," returned the squire; "tall as the noble earl beside me, but larger and less actively framed. His red beard curled, and almost covering his wild and savage countenance."

"The henchman next?" inquired Fitzgerald.

"Pshaw, thou hast seen him in the hall," replied Hubert. "And now, noble gentlemen, listen. — There is in yonder band a rider — he is a short but powerful man, well dressed and armed. His once red hair sprinkled thin with gray, and mounted on a black horse. Thou knowst him by description."

The cavaliers bowed assent.

"Then avoid him in the fight — pass him as you would a brother. That man belongs to me — and wo betide the sword that robs me of him! And now look to the pass; — ere long, if my lord deputy be the bustling knight that men account him, he will be near us."

As he spoke, the horseman, whom he had detached to leave the token intended to direct Worowski, joined them; and the whole party evinced that restlessness which men naturally feel when on the eve of some dangerous exploit, of which, though in itself inevitable, yet the precise moment of action is contingent on some circumstance whose occurrence is not exactly foretold. No wonder, then, that from the pass by which the lord deputy was to approach to the copse where his assailants were concealed, the eyes of the horsemen traversed the ground often and rapidly.

The forest which sheltered the hostile bands was admirably adapted for ambush and surprise. It was bounded by an inlet of the sea, whose narrow channel ran, for some distance, inland. Within some two miles of the termination of this salt lough, the trees became few and stunted, and at last gave place entirely to scattered patches of heath and underwood. Still farther, shrub and tree disappeared altogether, and a precipitous hill, formed of loose rocks, apparently ejected by some volcano, rose from the water's edge, and, towering to a thousand feet in height, seemed to form a boundary between this peninsula and the main.

A narrow path wound at the base of this rocky mountain, and, as huge and detached fragments of granite overhung its whole extent, the appearance of the road was one most unsafe and perilous to the traveller. Nor was the danger but ideal; for the path was here and there almost rendered impassable by detached portions of mountain granite, which frost or flood occasionally brought down from the heights above.

The whole of the hill and road was visible from the copses where the respective bands were concealed; and, no doubt, many an eye from both thickets was directed to the same spot — that by which the lord deputy and his attendants would approach the forest from the mountain pass of Dhu Hill.

While many a whispered conjecture was hazarded among Fitzgerald's companions touching the delay of the English knight, Hubert's keen eye first announced his approach. "I saw a lance-blade sparkle in the sunshine: look sharply to the summit of the ridge." He was correct; for presently a head-piece glittered above the rock, and next minute an armed rider cleared the defile, and issued through the pass; others quickly succeeded, till a band of some half-score horsemen were seen, in single files, descending from the heights; and, from their armour and appointments, were readily ascertained to be Sir Richard Bingham, accompanied by a slight escort of English cavalry.

CHAPTER XXI.

We have described the relative positions of the parties who waited — the one to surprise, and the other to support — to be two thick clumps of timber and underwood, separated by an open glade of hard turf. The English knights and the Dark Lady's riders occupied the copse upon the right; while the opposite brake, which concealed the rebel force, was rather nearer the entrance of the forest, and, of course, in advance of the party who were prepared to support the lord deputy, when assailed. This last circumstance was extremely favourable to the knights and their followers, as it enabled them to observe the movements of the enemy, themselves unseen. Presently, the rebel party, mounted and prepared for action, debouched from their ambuscade, and, forming line in double files, waited, under cover of the thicket, the nearer approach of the unsuspecting soldier and his weak escort. The body of horse that watched their movements had already made a similar disposition; and their leaders, with the squire, from the shelter of the copse, could observe distinctly the advance of the lord deputy, and the preparations of O'Neal for surprising him.

But their position conferred another advantage; for Hubert was enabled to point out the insurgent leaders to his companions.

"Mark you, Sir Knights," he said, "yonder large and powerful rider — he sits on a dark bay horse, and wears a scarlet plume?" The cavaliers nodded an affirmative. "That is Tyrone himself! Have at the red feather, knights! and let him, as you value lands and liberty, be your sole object. See ye a tall, ungraceful rider at his side, wearing a singular basnet, and mounted on a gray steed?"

"Aye, plainly, Hubert," was the reply.

"Then thou seest the Red Hand. And he in the tarnished surcoat and breastplate on his left — that is the rebel's henchman, Emmesin an Knock. You see they form on the right flank of the band — yours will be the same place. But I — though, as astrusty squire, I should not leave my master — must choose the other wing; for there, on the extreme left of the rebels, I

see my opponent;" and he pointed to the person he had already described as being mounted on a black horse.

While the cavaliers and their esquire were thus engaged in reconnoitring, an accident threatened to render their presence known to the rival band, and defeat their intended plans, as far as an unexpected assault was concerned. Owing to the negligence of a horseman, his charger escaped, and was breaking off directly towards the rebel party, when Montravers threw himself forward and luckily seized the bridle. This was indeed most fortunate; for, the appearance of a horse, with military appointments, rushing from the cover, would have naturally occasioned a discovery of the vicinity of the rival cavalry.

From the insurgent body the knights turned their attention to that part of the forest by which Sir Richard Bingham might be expected, and presently the lord deputy and his followers appeared. Although unsuspicious of any impending danger, the good knight, when clear of the defile, had resumed his march with military caution. Two files were in advance about one hundred yards from where the queen's deputy and his escort of ten dragoons moved steadily forward. The little band, though few, were formidable. They were fully armed in mail, and, beside sword and pistol, carried a short musquetoon slung by the saddle. In the centre, one horseman bore a lance, to which a bannarole, with the royal arms of England displayed, was attached, and, beside the pennon, a stout and goodly personage, armed in proof, and nobly mounted, was at once recognised to be the queen's lord deputy of Connaught. Farther observation was unnecessary —a few minutes would most likely bring the parties into action, and the cavaliers posted themselves in front of the right flank, while Hubert chose the left. There, having given the last orders for the party to charge with steadiness and keep an unbroken front, the young knights grasped each other affectionately by the hand, and unsheathing their swords, awaited the moment for action.

The advanced files of Sir Richard's cavalry showed themselves to be trusty videts. They had scarcely reached the skirting of the coppice before they discovered the concealed enemy. Instantly they reined their horses round, and returning on the spur, apprized their comrades of the ambuscade. The brave leader, although surprised, formed across the path in line, and disengaging their musquetoons from the saddle, the English troopers steadily awaited the coming storm.

Indeed there was but short period allowed them for preparation. The moment Tyrone perceived the videts turn, he gave the order to attack. Wheeling from the coppice, the rebel horse advanced to charge, and, at a rapid pace, with their war-cry of "Faugh a balla!" bore down upon their inferior enemy.

But, before their charge was effected, to the astonishment of the English cavalry, a body of horse were seen rushing upon the rebel rear, with cries of "Bingham! — to the rescue!" Animated by the unexpected succour, the English riders returned the war-cry boldly, and discharging their musquetoons with such effect as emptied three or four saddles of their assailants, they drew their broadswords and advanced to meet the shock. O'Neal too late remarked the danger of his situation. Although his own force exceeded the collective number of his enemies a fourth, yet he was assailed in front and flank together; and, conscious that the result could only be rendered favourable by desperate exertions, he rode directly at the lord deputy in person, and the Red Hand and his henchman supported him.

A desperate conflict ensued — the parties were nearly on an equality for, though the rebels were superior in numbers, the freshness of the Dark Lady's riders, and the discipline and courage of the English horse, made

them fully a match for their insurgent antagonists. The field exhibited a general melée. The horsemen fought hand to hand, while the leaders on each side singled out each other.

The point where the fight was fiercest was round the pennon of Sir Richard Bingham. Before Tyrone could capture the bannarole, or slay the lord deputy, he found himself furiously assailed by Fitzgerald and the master of horse, and a momentary glance at the bearing of the knights showed him that he had formidable assailants to oppose. Both the cavaliers pushed their horses at the rebel chief; and so desperate was their first onset, that the Red Hand and the minstrel threw themselves between. O'Neal had received more than one sword-cut before his followers could achieve his rescue.

A combat between these inferior leaders and the English knights succeeded. Emmeein of the Hill opposed himself stoutly to the master of the horse, while the Red Hand engaged Fitzgerald. Burning with rage, that the object of his vengeance should escape him, Montravers turned his fury against the minstrel, who, in no way intimidated by the assault of his fierce assailant, attacked him again in turn. Several blows were interchanged, when the rebel made an effort to cut his antagonist down, by an extraordinary effort; but quick as lightning, the master of horse pushed within the minstrel's cut, and shortening his own rapier, passed it, with one home-thrust, through Emmeein's heart, who fell from his saddle a dead man.

Nor was Fitzgerald's encounter likely to have a different result. The Red Hand's strength was fairly expended on his more practised enemy, who was perfect master of his weapon. Twice, in return, the knight's sword wounded the rebel; and beating down his guard, the Red Hand was almost at his mercy; when a random pistol-shot unfortunately struck his horse, who fell beneath him mortally wounded. His situation was now most critical, but an unexpected ally appeared. The ommadawn, with a band of half-armed peasants, had, almost unseen, mingled in the affray. Mixing among the riders, they stabbed the horsemen with their long pikes, or more effectually completed the work of death with knives and middoges. All opposition on the rebel part ceased. Tyrone gallopped from the field. The Red Hand followed, scarcely able to keep his saddle; and about a score of riders, the survivors of this short but sanguinary conflict, went off at speed, in every direction they thought most likely to ensure them an escape. In fact the rebel party were totally disorganized.

The battle was over; but at the extreme left, and some distance from the scene of action, two men were observed closely and fiercely engaged. In one of them the knights recognised their mysterious esquire, pressing a solitary rebel nard, who defended himself with uncommon determination. But fortune, it would appear, had declared against the followers of Tyrone. Hubert's opponent lost his saddle; and, springing to the ground, the squire passed his rapier through the body of his fallen enemy; and, as if he would make assurance doubly sure, repeated the thrust.

The victory was, indeed, decisive, and a score of the assailants were stretched upon the field. The lord deputy's attendants interchanged their greetings with the lady's retainers, while the knights addressed Sir Richard, with courteous inquiries if he had escaped being wounded in the melée. Dismounting from his charger, the deputy advanced to the cavaliers, and with the frank and grateful feelings which their timely succour called forth, he embraced his young deliverers.

"Now, by mine honour, I never saw a braver affair. Noble knights, Richard Bingham owes ye a life; for never came rescue at sharper need. When those Catarans rushed from the thicket yonder, I little recked so bold an ally was beside us. Gentlemen, the queen's banner, but for you, had sped but poorly. Will you honour me with your names, that my royal

mistress may know to whom her poor servant and her bannarole owe their safety."

The knights appeared confused. "Nay, Gerald, off with disguise — we are wronged and injured men, and why not avow our names and titles to the noble deputy?"

"My companion says true; — we are reckoned, Sir Richard, among the good queen's enemies," said Fitzgerald.

"May she have many such!" exclaimed the lord deputy. — "If this day's work be treason, I am sorely puzzled to guess its meaning. Gentlemen, there is some mystery in this. If you would conceal your names, do so in good welcome; but if, like many a brave soldier, false tongues have wrought ye evil, leave it to Richard Bingham to disabuse his royal mistress, and clear from foul suspicion as gallant and devoted subjects as any she boasts in Britain."

Both knights bowed. "Concealment is neither requisite, nor have we aught to hide from the queen's deputy. My friend is a quondam follower of the brave Earl of Essex, and I the heir of the Geraldines: and now, lord deputy, our crimes are said."

"And is this gentleman, as I ween, the gallant master of horse that stuck so boldly to his noble patron when others deserted him?" asked the old knight.

"I am Ralph Montravers," was the reply.

"Then Richard Bingham is proud to hold his noble friend's tried soldier in his arms — and may heaven bless thee, Ralph! And thou — I guess my Lord of Kildare is near me ——"

"If right were done him," added Fitzgerald.

"Now, by heaven!" said the old knight, "I hold my rescue light, before the service I shall do my precious queen in giving her the service of two wronged and loyal gentlemen. But of this more anon. What means this attack upon us, gentlemen? There have been whisperers who told us the good Lady of Doona was not over-zealous in her attachment; — but surely she would not countenance a treacherous attack?"

"My good Lord Deputy, you wrong her by the thought; — to her you owe your rescue. We were but guests with the Dark Lady — and those who accompanied us are her clansmen or kinnahans. Know you, Lord Deputy, your foe? — none less than the perjured traitor, Tyrone!"

"God's mercy! — what O'Neal himself?" said Sir Richard.

"Aye, he with the red plume, that strove so hard to reach your pennon, Lord Deputy, was the attainted earl. I pushed at him — 't were fit, you know, that two of the same class should join battle, Ralph."

"Noble Fitzgerald, I must not hear this, even in jest; — trust me, my royal mistress only requires to know thy worth to right thy grievances; and, for lack of a better informant, myself will undertake the office."

"My lord, I feel your kindness — and now let us view the field; — for I think, judging by the industry of my friends, the dead by this time are plundered by our good allies, whom Worowski brought so opportunely to our aid. But I must have a horse — curse on the blundering fool that sped this noble gray. So ho! Ommadawn, catch me a horse — there are enough of them straggling about with lighter saddles than they had an hour ago."

"There is a good one of mine," said the deputy, "which I grieve to observe now lacks a rider;" and he pointed to a war-horse, that, with military instinct, had, when he lost his master, rejoined the troop and formed beside his companions. Fitzgerald mounted, and, with the lord deputy and the master of horse, proceeded to view the field.

The forest glade, so fresh and green at sunrise, presented now a very different appearance. Some twenty corpses were here and there extended in the careless positions the plunderers had left them, and the various

expressions of agony and rage which their countenances had exhibited in life were now retained in death. The wounded were, with the rude assistance of their fellows, endeavouring to staunch their cuts; while a few of the peasants' wives, whose husbands had followed Worowski, were supplying them with water, and ministering, as they best could, with feminine kindness, to their relief. Of the enemy there were but few survivors, for the pikes and middoges of the ommadawn's companions had ended their struggles when they fell from the saddle. The equality of the combatants, and the ferocity with which the assault of desperate men was repelled by others equally determined, had made this short affair most sanguinary. The loss of the vanquished was necessarily much greater than that sustained by the victors, which, with the exception of two of the queen's troopers, and as many of the Lady's kinnahans, was confined to ten wounded. Several dead or disabled steeds, a surface spotted with blood, and cut up with hoof-marks, broken weapons, and head-pieces lost in the affray, or thrown off in the flight, completed a battle-field which would have suited the painter's pencil well.

As the knights rode slowly over the ground, commending individual gallantry, or cheering the spirits of the wounded with assurances of speedy relief and future reward, they reached the extreme left of the glade, where Hubert was still remaining beside the rebel whom they had seen him slay in single combat. The squire had slackened the girths of his steed, and appeared resting after the hurry and fatigue of the melée.

"Remark yonder horseman," said Fitzgerald to his companion, the lord deputy.

"I have already noticed him," replied Sir Richard, "for I witnessed his tough encounter with yon prostrate rebel. Never did men appear to bandy blows more heartily, till one brave thrust finished the encounter."

"Thou owest thy rescue, noble Deputy, to him. 'Twas he who in some manner discovered the intended attack, and apprized us that instant relief was wanted — but for whom we knew not, till Hubert met us in the forest, and told us that your life depended on prompt rescue."

"I shall reward him well," returned the old knight; "and now I would thank him for his timely succour — but — strange! methinks that form I have seen ere now — aye! and the lineaments of the face are those of one with whom I have been acquainted. Come hither, young man," he continued, as he addressed the squire — "I would express my obligation for life and liberty at present, and assure thee, on a knight's word, that more than empty thanks shall testify Richard Bingham's gratitude."

Hubert bowed. — "Nay, my good lord, you owe me little. Chance betrayed the rebel earl's intended villany; and if I have saved a brave soldier, and marred a murderer's plot, I am already well paid."

While the deputy and the squire conversed, the master of horse had ridden close to the dead rebel beside them, and examined his features with the curiosity the implacable feelings which the squire had expressed towards the deceased naturally excited. Montravers turned the corpse over, and the face of a man considerably advanced in years presented itself. The fierce and care-worn features indicated a life spent in danger and hardship; the expression of the countenance was gloomy and malevolent, which an old scar across the brow and cheek rendered additionally ferocious; the eyes, which were wide open, preserved, in death, a threatening and ghastly stare; and the hair, once deep red, time and hardship had changed almost to whiteness.

The master of horse having apparently satisfied his curiosity, turned to the squire: "By Saint George! Hubert, thou hast sped as ill-favoured a gentleman as one would wish to meet in wood or wild. Was he a rebel only to our good queen, or did he, as I suspect, occasionally worship Saint

Nicholas? for, if nature made him honest, she did him sad injustice in giving him the features of a rank Cataran. Thou certainly must have been deeply in his debt, for, never did thy country's wolf-dog stick closer to his quarry, than thou to him, good squire."

"Master of the horse," returned Hubert, solemnly, "I owed him a debt of vengeance, and I told thee beforehand that no other hand than mine should pay it. That carrion there, by one act of damned treachery, caused more blood to flow than the morning's fray has spilled upon this field. But see, I caught a flash of steel through yonder coppice! Though, as I take it, our enemies are almost exterminated, we should not, however, be taken unprepared, and, with your leave, lord deputy, I shall desire your trumpet to collect our riders." So saying, Hubert leaped to the saddle, and in a few minutes a wild blast summoned the scattered horsemen around the queen's bannarole. The master of horse, by Sir Richard's desire, rode off to form the united bands, and the knights remained with their eyes directed to the place where Hubert had perceived the appearance of an advancing force. Nor was the squire mistaken. A few riders, who formed the videts, issued from the copse. The tall knight recognised the cognizance of the Dark Lady, and apprized his companion that it was a friendly band. But all doubt was speedily ended—a horseman, when he perceived the cavaliers, pricked forward at speed, and, making the knights his rough obeisance, informed them that the Ban Oussel was arrived in person at the head of a body of her retainers.

CHAPTER XXII.

While the horseman still spoke, a small body of cavalry debouched from the forest, and advanced towards the scene of the recent combat. They were neither so well mounted nor appointed as the riders who had accompanied Fitzgerald from Doona, and had altogether a wilder and more irregular appearance; yet, as light cavalry, they were admirably well adapted for the difficult and wooded country where they acted, and the Dark Lady's prickers, as those *cossack* horsemen were then termed, were far more serviceable for a desultory warfare than heavier and better mounted men-at-arms.

Immediately after the advanced guard had entered the glade, the Lady of Doona rode out from the copse. She was mounted on a powerful jennet, and while the housings and chamfron, bit and breast-piece, with which he was caparisoned, were all extremely rich, the holsters at her saddle-bow, and the masculine attire and carriage of the stern dame, had altogether a strange and incongruous look, which both the knights remarked. Even her immediate attendants exhibited a strange anomaly. On her right hand rode her seneschal and foster-brother—a man advanced in life, whose grizzled beard, scarred brow, and hard and severe-cast countenance, united to a powerful and iron frame, proclaimed the tried warrior, while his dress, neither gay enough for a cavalier, nor rude enough for a gallow-glass, gave to this wild soldier more the appearance of a leader of banditti, than the trusty castellan of a lady's tower. On the left, mounted on a small but elegant Andalusian horse, a beautiful boy, richly and elegantly apparelled, accompanied the Ban Oussel. The cloak, of Spanish silk, reached to the stirrups, and nearly concealed his embroidered surcoat and hose, while a cap of piled velvet, surmounted by a waving plume of white ostrich feathers, and tawny buskins with gilt spurs, completed the attire of the handsome page. A strong band of infantry, well but variously armed, marched in close column, and a few light prickers brought up the rear.

Halting when she had ridden to the centre of the glade, the Ban Ousal waited the approach of the knights; and the cavaliers dismounting accordingly, advanced to pay her their courteous greetings. The lady received their compliments with evident satisfaction. She returned the lord deputy's in noble and well-timed congratulation for his late escape — while she smiled upon the tall knight with unusual graciousness; and placing her hand upon his shoulder, as he stood beside her palfrey, asked in a tone of kindness very rarely evinced, "if her dear son had escaped from the affray unhurt." And when the lord deputy spoke in ardent terms of the gallant bearing of the young knights in the recent conflict, — when he described their personal encounters with the minstrel and the Red Hand, her eyes glistened with delight; and she gazed upon Fitzgerald with all the pleasure with which the warrior's mother hails her boy when his maiden field is won.

But never was astonishment more boundless than the Dark Lady's, when apprized that Tyrone had been the assailant of the lord deputy, and that moreover he had been on the preceding evening actually a guest within her castle. Instantly she despatched her foster-brother, with the light riders and infantry that accompanied her, to pursue and apprehend, living or dead, the rebel earl. Only waiting for a hurried description of his person, and the direction in which O'Neal and the Red Hand had ridden off, the fosterer* divided his followers into numerous parties, and set off in the pursuit, scouring the thickets as he went along, while the cavalry pricked on at speed by every path in the forest which would admit horsemen to retire by. Then addressing herself to the old knight, the Dark Lady asked from him a full detail of the affair, to which she listened with a warrior's pleasure when he hears the tidings of a well-fought fray.

"And now," she said, "brave gentlemen, I would view the ground. — Nay, my good lord, I perceive thou wouldst dissuade me, because some score of knaves are stretched yonder with cloven crowns. The sight has no alarm for me; — for Grace O'Malley has looked before now upon dead enemies;" and a gloomy recollection of deeds of violence chased the lighter expression her features had worn just now. When the cavaliers were mounted she proceeded slowly to the scene of action, halting when she came to where her own followers and those of Sir Richard's escort were formed under the orders of the master of the horse.

She greeted Montravers with great cordiality; and addressing the lord deputy, said — "I would ask of you, noble sir, whether we are bound, by good service on this knight's part, to redeem a rash promise we made him, rather unadvisedly. We would pray you to give us a cautious and a candid answer, as, by our Lady! a steed or galley may be called for to pay penalty. Did the master of the horse bear him boldly in the conflict, lord deputy?"

"Faith, lady, I fear horse or galley goes, if either abide by my report. But methinks the master may safely rest the issue upon proof; and yonder lies a knave, sped by as true a stoccato as ever hand and rapier gave;" and he pointed to Emmeein su Knock, who lay extended upon his back, within a few paces of the lady. She gazed for a moment on the features, and then recognising the dead minstrel —

"Ho, ho!" she cried, "we should recollect that face; — an I mistake not, 'twas he who bandied defiance with us, in our hall, last night, so lustily; ha! sir knight, hast thou spoiled his song? — and, by mine honour, for many a year I have not heard one who could touch the harp so skilfully. But, holy mother! what ails our page? has a rebel corpse frightened the fool to fainting;" and she turned her jennet to where the page had halted; but the young attendant's illness had been observed by another, before

* Anglice — foster-brother.

the lady's eye had noticed it. Montravers sprang from his horse, and reached the fainting rider, only in time to prevent her falling from the saddle.

"Now, out upon thee for a coward!" exclaimed the Ban Oussel scornfully — "Nay, it is too much trouble, master of the horse," she continued, as the knight, supporting the page with his arm, led off the palfrey from the field of death, and stopping where a clump of underwood shut out the bloody tokens of the battle, lifted his mistress from the saddle, and placed her on the turf. The lady's fiery temper did not permit her dwelling beyond a remark or two upon the boy's timidity, on this alarm of her attendant; and continuing her survey of the field, she approached the extreme left, where Hubert was still resting.

The little copse behind which the master of the horse and the pretty page were seated, was at some distance from the Dark Lady and her companions the cavaliers. Montravers found himself beside his beloved Florence, and, as he pressed her to his bosom, he once more renewed his pledge of love. "I have won thee, Florence," he cried with transport — "I will claim thee from the lady; and ere the sun sinks thou shalt be my betrothed bride. But where am I to take thee, my pretty one? Is it right to steal thee from thy home to wander with a broken man like me?"

"Hush! hush!" said the page. "Alas! thou little knowest, sweet knight, what woman's love is. I will wander with thee to the world's end with pleasure; while, if I were left in yonder tower, and thou shouldst leave the country, and desert me, I think my very heart would burst, or my brain madden. But I tell thee too much, Ralph. Thou wilt but think the less of me for this weakness." A passionate burst of tears followed; while the master of the horse kissed his confiding fair one. "Come, Florence, cheer up — this is the last day the page shall wear his doublet. Art thou recovered yet?" — the page answered in the affirmative. "Then let me lift thee to the saddle, lest the Dark Lady should suspect our loves, before the hour comes when we may avow them safely." He placed the beautiful boy, whose cheeks again had recalled the truant roses which the battle-field had chased, upon the palfrey; and leading the horse from the scene of action towards the entrance of the forest, he left her with a party of the Ban Oussel's retainers, and, mounting his own horse, rode at speed across the glade to where the Lady of Doona and her noble companions were already in conversation with the knight's esquire.

"Thou hast for ever bound me to thee, Hubert," said the Ban Oussel, as the master of horse joined them, "by thy faithful and invaluable service. Claim what reward thou wilt, and here, before this noble company, I swear by my father's ashes, I will, an it be but within the scope of reason, freely give it."

"Enough, lady — I will claim a boon, but it will not be a mercenary one."

"And I, young man, am also bounden to thee for preservation of life from treachery, that nothing but timely and providential aid effected. Remember, I am thy debtor too."

"I shall not forget, noble sir," said Hubert.

"And what shall *we* say?" said the taller knight, pointing to Montravers.

"Words are the only means we wanderers possess at present, but a day may come when — "

"The Earl of Kildare, and the chosen friends of Essex, might do some service to the schipper of the Jolly Tar; — is it not so?" asked the squire, with a smile.

"Thou art a shrewd knave! marry, to tell thy master's secrets to the queen's deputy, and her good ally, the Lady of Doona. An the keep has a dungeon, I trow, through thy good offices and information, we are likely to obtain a lodging in it."

"The keep has a dungeon," said the lady, "and if the lord deputy wills

't, the key is his — I, as a loyal and faithful subject, will place it at his service. — But, sola, sir squire, we are a trifle in thy debt already. What think you, Lord Deputy — for thou shalt judge between us — Did a rude knave seize on the pennon of thy band, and treat it with base indignity, wouldst thou resent it?"

"I would, were his skull not sword proof, try the temper of my blade upon it sharply;" replied Sir Richard.

"Then that is a course I cannot in the present case adopt. — Look on that knave there! He sent my galley back with a wet banner, and more broken heads to boot, than the leech could patch for a whole month."

"Alas, lady!" said Hubert, "it was all a mistake. Mayhap, I took the flying horse for a winged griffon; and ere I found my error, the mischief happened."

"Well, hadst thou staved the galley — so that the poor knaves of seamen sank not — for this day's service I forgive thee; and, if they failed to keep their heads with their hands, why marry! they deserved to have their crowns cracked. But who have we here? This, I suspect, was some runaway, he is so remote from his companions;" and she looked carelessly on the corpse of the rebel who had fallen in personal encounter with the squire. The latter hesitated for a moment, and then in an under voice replied, "That rebel, lady, fell by the only hand that should have slain him — my own."

"Were you at mortal feud with him?" inquired the dame. "He must have been an old foe, for by the mass, time had laid his hand upon him visibly."

"He was, indeed, an old enemy, for I had sworn his death almost from the hour I could lisp an oath," said Hubert.

"Let me think," she murmured, and the colour faded from her lips, while her brow darkened. "Have I seen that corpse before the breath left it? — I cannot recall the face."

"Thou hast, indeed, seen it," returned the squire.

"Where? — when?" exclaimed the lady, as her eyes flashed, and a confused recollection of some unhappy transaction came over her for a moment, so as to make her lips and cheeks colourless."

"I will tell thee, anon," said Hubert coldly.

Mortified that a circumstance of this kind should have occurred to cause the unusual agitation which she betrayed in the presence of her guests, the proud spirit of the Dark Lady fired. By a powerful exertion, she seemed to recover her self-possession, bent a haughty look upon the squire, and, remarked with great indifference, "Why information will come, no doubt, in good time, for, as I ween, there can be little connected with that carrion to interest us." As she ended, a follower approached and notified that some refreshment was prepared for the cavaliers at a little distance from the scene of blood, and this opportunely diverted the attention of all. "And now, sirs," said the Dark Lady, "we will give some directions touching the disposal of these corpses before we quit the field. Worowski!" she exclaimed. "Tell him, good Hubert, that we would speak with him." The squire obeyed her bidding, and the ommadawn was speedily in her presence.

"Worowski, thou wilt have these fallen rebels thrown into a grave upon the spot that witnessed the discomfiture of their villany. The sooner this is done, the better. As to the queen's good soldiers and our faithful kinnahans, who have unhappily fallen, let their bodies be removed to the village behind yon oak wood. Have them laid out in all honour. See that a wake befitting brave and loyal soldiers be theirs; and we will take care that a plentiful supply, to grace their funeral rites, of wine and ale, be sent thee from the castle. I perceive our own leech is employed with our

wounded men. Let such as can keep saddle return to Doona, where ourselves shall see that they be well attended; and those whose hurts will not permit a distant movement, let them be carried on litters to the village, and our own leech shall be answerable for the rest. Come, my honoured friends, I see our poor followers are provided with some refreshment. We, too, shall lack it;" and the lady turned her horse towards the forest, accompanied by the lord deputy, the young knights, and their mysterious esquire.

Beneath the expanded foliage of a huge oak-tree, a very plentiful refection was laid out; a server from the castle was waiting in attendance, and the page, dismounted and uncloaked, stood in his rich dress in readiness to wait upon his mistress. Some of the ommadawn's followers were there to tend the horses; and the Dark Dame, having placed herself upon a horseman's cloak, which was stretched upon the greensward for her accommodation, requested the lord deputy and knights to partake of what she termed "a rude and poor refreshment." The Ban Oussel seemed unusually gracious. Noticing that the deputy's surprise was occasioned by the beauty of the page, she addressed the blushing boy, and inquired if he had yet forgotten the bugbear that affrighted him. "'T is a poor coward, lord deputy; we cannot instil courage into that timid heart of his—and, 'fore God! we think the cloister is best suited for one who has such terror of the field."

"Now, Heaven forbid!" replied the lord deputy, "that one so beautiful as that fair boy should be put within convent bars. But I perceive thou holdest communication with him by signs only."

"He is dumb," said the Ban Oussel; "but thou lack'st wine, noble sir." She gave Florence the customary signal; but Hubert instantly advanced from the oak against which he leaned. He took the cup from the page, whose agitation was pitiable.—"Nay, boy," he said, "sit thee down;—this battle-field, lady, has almost made a woman of him;" and, apparently disregarding the reproving glance which the remark called from the Dark Dame, he handed the lord deputy the goblet. The lady appeared to agree to the page's being unfit for his customary duty. "Sit down, my boy.—Pardon me, noble sirs—the green wood banishes ceremony; and, with your good leave, thy own bold squire and my poor boy shall join us.—Nay, Hubert, we will have it so. Be what thou wilt, squire or schipper, thou hast nobly and faithfully redeemed thy pledge, by enabling our noble guest to discomfit the false villain who would have taken him at base vantage."

Hubert bowed, and placing himself rather without the circle formed by the knights and lady, sat down upon the grass to refresh himself; while, covered with blushes, as if to avoid observation, the handsome page placed himself directly behind the Dark Lady of Doona.

"Fill a full goblet, Marcus," cried the dame, as she signed to the server;—"we will drink to our victory." The attendant obeyed; he filled the cup to the very brim with the wine of Burgundy, and placing it in the lady's hand, stood prepared to hand it to the Deputy. The Ban Oussel, as her eye flashed with proud and excited feelings, raised it to her lips, but ere the brim touched them, a wild and mournful cry burst from the copse beside her; and, issuing from the glade, the fallen soldiers were borne past upon temporary biers formed from boughs hastily cut from the underwood. The women, who had followed their sons and husbands, with Worowski, formed the funeral mourners; and the heart-touching lament of Ireland, at all times so melancholy, in the loneliness of the forest, and close to a battle-field, had a deep effect upan the listeners. The Dark Lady laid down the cup, and devoutly crossing herself, uttered a prayer for the dead, in which Hubert and the page joined. The Deputy and the knights, holding the reformed

faith, preserved a respectful silence till the mourning train disappeared, and dying away in the forest, the wail for the dead became feebler and feebler still, until its sounds were heard no more.

Presently the Dark Lady recovered her accustomed indifference. With the last cadence of the lament her feelings appeared to change. She called for the cup again, and, in a calm but solemn tone pronouncing "to the memory of the brave!" she placed it to her lips, and passed it to her noble guests.

"Under the greenwood tree," for an hour, the dame entertained her guests right nobly. At last she pointed to the shadow of the trees, and remarked that evening was approaching. Hubert was despatched to order up the riders, who had been refreshing themselves and their horses — for the lady had not neglected to send provender from the tower; and, after another cup, the steeds were bridled once more; and the Dark Lady, with the Lord Deputy on her right, and "her own lieutenant," as she playfully termed Fitzgerald, on the left, rode through the forest towards Doona. Montravers fell back beside the handsome page; and Hubert, assuming the command of the cavalry, in the absence of the knights, followed at a short distance.

Whether it was that the Dark Lady was so much occupied with her own thoughts, or too deeply attentive to the Deputy's narrative of the late affair, to notice the absence of the master of horse, certain it is that the huge tower of Doona showed at no great distance through the oak wood, before she appeared to miss him from her side.

As some ceremonial was necessary to be observed when the Queen's bannarole should approach the Lady's tower, the band was ordered to halt, and the master of horse requested by the Lord Deputy to arrange the escort fitly. The proper dispositions were promptly made. A small party of the Lady's riders formed the advance. The Deputy and the royal pennon, attended by the Ban Oussel, the page, and the knight, and guarded by the English men-at-arms, occupied the centre; while Hubert and the remainder of the light cavalry brought up the rear.

Proudly the Ban Oussel's heart throbbed when she saw the royal bannarole approaching her castle, and recollected that, by her relief, the English Lieutenant had been saved. She had despatched a courier long since to order that due respect should mark the arrival of her honourable guest; and now she rode by his side, offering all those courtesies which, when she pleased it, she could render so well.

On debouching from the wood, the old tower, with its flanking walls and the surrounding buildings, showed bravely in the red light of a clear and brilliant autumnal sunset. The Dark Lady's "flying horse" had disappeared from the flag-staff of the keep, and in its place the standard of England waved. The compliment was not lost upon the Queen's Lieutenant; and, when the royal banner appeared, a noble salvo was discharged from the battlements, the castle-gates thrown open, and a numerous and hardy band, armed with pike and calever, saluted the Deputy as he crossed the bridge. Gratified by the deference paid to him by the Dark Lady, he whispered to Fitzgerald — "If our hostess be ill-affected, the symptoms of her disloyalty are marvellous."

As they rode beneath the gateway, the Ban Oussel said to the knight — "Gerald, I have thy promise not to hold communication with Ines for some three short hours." Fitzgerald bowed assent. "The penance will not be heavy, and, at supper, we shall all meet. Look, my son, to the Lord Deputy — a woman is ill suited to offer hospitality to noble lords. I leave the task entirely to thee — for I have somewhat important to arrange, that must be done ere nightfall."

Courteously committing the Lord Deputy to the knight's keeping, the

lady begged and obtained permission to retire; while Sir Richard Bingham accompanied Fitzgerald to the chamber which had hitherto been occupied by himself and the master of horse.

CHAPTER XXIII.

While the principal characters in this narrative were busily engaged in the varied transactions of this eventful day, there was one, who, though distant from the scene of action, felt certainly more interested than all beside. Inez, from her lonely chamber, had witnessed the hurried departure of her lover, and received his silent adieu as he rode from the court-yard. The confusion visible throughout the castle, the military preparation, and sudden march of the knights and riders, announced that some perilous and alarming event had happened; and these suspicions were realized, when the Dark Lady in person, placing herself at the head of the first reinforcements that moved, left the tower, and followed the same direction the horsemen had pursued some hours before. Left in her deserted chamber, agonized by uncertainty, fearful of some impending calamity, the exact nature of which she could not fancy — and in this pitiable state even abandoned by the page, and left without a voice to whisper hope and discourage those gloomy forebodings that ever pointed to the worst — poor Inez watched the progress of the sun with feverish impatience, vainly expecting some information that would end her miserable suspense. Every time the gate-horn sounded, as new allies came fast from hill and island, the fair girl's heart throbbed, hoping the fresh arrival would bring some tidings of her lover. At last a wounded pricker rode in — his face, though pale and bloody, announced him to be the bearer of good news; and the lady at length learned from the warder, that a sharp and bloody conflict had taken place between the English knights and some rebel leaders, which had ended in the defeat of the latter. She was also informed that her lover was unhurt; and further, that a noble lord had been rescued when waylaid on his journey to the tower, and might be immediately expected at the castle with his deliverers and the Dark Lady.

And was this the titled gallant of whose suit the stern dame had apprized her in their last night's interview? Alas! it seemed only too probable. One source of misery was removed, but only to give place to fresh unhappiness. There was this unwelcome suitor approaching; and her gallant lover had displayed his gallantry and perilled his life, only to rescue a powerful and noble rival.

Nor were these feelings removed, when, from the tower-top, which she had ascended, to command a wider prospect of the forest, and watch the return of the knights, she observed the Dark Lady with a strange and distinguished cavalier at her right hand, issuing from the wood, and engaged in earnest and confidential conversation. She saw the master of horse some distance behind talking to the page, and in the rear, her own loved knight, in deep discourse with his esquire. The wild blast of the trumpet — the salute from the battlements, and the military honours so obsequiously paid to the stranger's banner, all struck her to the heart, and it was not surprising that the page found her companion in great distress; when, with glowing face and extended arms, she rushed in to communicate the details of a gallant field and safe return.

Although Florence had not learned enough to relieve the fears of Inez altogether, yet her confused tale went far to calm her apprehensions, and raise hopes again within her bosom; and, while the gentle page dried her

tears, and whispered that all would yet end fortunately, Una, the Dark Lady's favourite attendant, conveyed a message from the dame, that her grandchild's presence would be required in the hall that evening, and that she should attire herself in fitting guise, to receive the Lady's noble guest — the Queen's Lord Deputy of Connaught. Florence had already commenced the necessary preparations to assist the toilet of her lovely companion, when the silver bell called her to the chamber of the Ban Oussel — but she was not absent long. She bounded into the apartment like a hunted deer — her cheeks flushed — her look excited. "Now Florence, what, in our Lady's name, has happened?" exclaimed Inez, in alarm. The page, without reply, flung herself upon the speaker's neck. She sobbed convulsively, but tears came and relieved her, as she replied — "Oh! I shall be no longer a boy. The Dark Lady has desired me to assume my proper dress; and, now, hateful disguise, I throw thee off for ever!" She said, and tossed the gay doublet on the floor, while, unclosing a case, she exhibited to her astonished friend some rich and costly jewels with which the Ban Oussel had presented her, desiring her to wear them at the banquet.

While the youthful occupants of the upper chamber were thus engaged, the Dark Lady paced her private apartment in deep and momentous meditation. "Go," she said to her attendant; "when we want aught we will summon thee." The person thus addressed, rose and retired, and the Ban Oussel, having watched the closing of the door, again resumed her musings. 'It is the voice of heaven," she murmured, "that whispers in my breast, another course of life should mark my waning existence; and this last busy scene would form a goodly termination to a career such as woman has seldom followed. It is worthy of Grace O'Malley's fame, — it is fitting to be the final action of the Ban Dunagha's perilous and eventful story. All conspires to make me seize the present moment, for executing my half-formed resolution. It shall be done — and it is meet that an act of justice should accompany it." She leaned her head against the high chair which she usually sat in, but in a few minutes she rose, as if under sudden impulse, and, in a deep voice pronouncing, "It shall be so — and such shall be my unchangeable resolve!" strode over the chamber again. Just then a slight tap was heard, — it was repeated more distinctly, and when the Ban Oussel, annoyed at the untimely interruption, in a harsh tone, desired the person to come in, and walked to the inner door to recover her accustomed composure, her surprise was boundless, when, on turning towards the door, instead of one of her own domestics, she discovered that her visiter was none other than Hubert the knight's esquire.

"I crave your pardon, noble lady," said the squire, as he bowed. "I fear I have intruded on your presence at an unwelcome season; but my business, I conceived, demanded a private interview." The Ban Oussel had placed herself in her chair. The high and stern bearing that her late meditation had softened down returned, when she found herself with a stranger; and coldly inquiring if his brave masters and the noble Deputy were duly accommodated, she asked, with assumed indifference, "What momentous affair it was that required such secret converse as his communication, it would appear, demanded?" — "Lady," he replied, "thou dost not know the means by which I accidentally overheard the rebel leaders arranging their morning's attack upon the Queen's Deputy; for it would appear that the holy churchman, whom, for lack of better messengers, I was, in my need, obliged to make my envoy, has but indifferently informed you of his own adventure in the forest, and most imperfectly delivered his commands from me."

"Faith, friend Hubert," said the Ban Oussel, "had the dog-priest told truth, thy greeting was not over-flattering to our fair fame; for, as the monk delivered himself, thou wouldst have had us meet thee at the Ped-

ler's Cairn alone; and that, too, as unceremoniously as if we were thy Lady light o'love."

"Plague on the frowzy sinner," said the squire, smiling, "what with fear and a stoup of rhenish in the guard-room, I only marvel he had memory enough left to bethink him of the tablets. But — Ban Oussel — what are thy secret outlets from this tower? or is there any, save the private postern that opens on the forest?"

The Dark Lady started. "Secret outlets! — there are none that I know of, sir squire. I have ever held such things as dangerous, and far more likely to admit an enemy from without, than benefit those that be within."

"Yet, Lady, believe me that such there are;" and Hubert briefly repeated the plan to surprise Doona, which he had overheard arranged by the leaders of the rebel party.

"By our Lady! sir squire, thy tale astonishes me; — but we will look to it incontinently. Thou didst well, friend Hubert, to communicate thy news in private — for such matters are best known to few." She touched a wire as she spoke; a bell sounded, and a female attendant answered it.

"Kathleen," she continued, "go to the gate, and tell Duncan of the Key we want him here directly." The female retired. "This is our oldest retainer; and though not of the family who formerly owned the hold, he was from infancy in their service. If an outlet, as Tyrone described it, exists — and surely the rebel earl would indulge in no idle tale at such a time, — we shall soon ascertain whether its situation be known or not."

Presently the under-warden, who united the offices of occasional jailer with his duty as porter, was announced.

He was a man of some fifty years, and a stout, brawny, determined-looking vassal, as ever turned key in grate or dungeon. He made his rude obeisance, and stood in some surprise, as he looked from the squire to the lady, as if demanding whether a cast of his office was required for the knights' attendant.

"Duncan," said the dame, "thou hast been long in the castle, and know'st the building well, — are there any ways to pass from the court-yard, except by gate and postern?"

"None beside these," replied he of the key.

"None else? — nay, bethink thee," returned the Dark Lady.

"Ban Oussel Dhu," said the jailer, "I have lived from childhood here; and for forty-five summers can recollect Doona; but of such passage as you speak, I wot not."

"And never heard of such?" inquired the dame.

"Stay, Lady! I remember, when very young, that there were some idle stories which I have almost forgotten. The Macmahon Beg — I mean him who died at Cahir. — " The retainer, fearing he had awakened recollections which would be disagreeable, paused in his narrative. The Lady's brow grew dark, while Hubert seemed ill at ease. The dame, however, soon recalled her self-possession, as she exclaimed, "On with thy tale, fellow! — What the foul fiend stops thee?"

He of the key continued, "'T was said that Connell Macmahon was wild and reckless, cared little for any thing save his own pleasure, nor scrupled at the means he used to gain it. He had a favourite follower, who, men said, encouraged him in his wild career. None touched the harp so well, and he proved both a dangerous and seductive companion for the unhappy chief. Many an island maid and inland wife, 't was said, were brought within these walls; and here they were seen, and disappeared, and none knew how they came or went, till it was whispered that there was a secret passage, opening to the sea, by which the chief's confidential friends were enabled to enter and leave the tower when it pleased them to do so

unnoticed. With Connell's death, the story gradually died away; and till you, Ban Oussel, recalled it, it had nearly slipped from my memory."

"And what part of the castle did they say the passage led from?" asked the lady.

"From the vault beneath this tower," replied the man of the key.

"Why, there are our wine-cellars. Call us our sewer, and attend thyself. This is a strange tale, if true, and needs our immediate attention. Hast thou been long upon the seas?" she said, addressing the knights' esquire.

"Some years, lady," was the reply.

"To judge from thy tongue, I would guess thee for our countryman, although thy accent is somewhat of a foreign one," continued the Dark Dame.

"I was born in this island; but a wandering life, from infancy, has scarcely left me any land that I should say was mine before another," said Hubert.

The Lady was interrupted by the return of Duncan of the Key, accompanied by the head sewer. "Get thee lights instantly. We wish to examine thy wine-butts."

"Aye, marry, and welcome, noble lady! — and thou wilt find my poor cellarage, I trust, in order. There are torches already in the vaults; all I lack is but my lantern, and in one minute I shall procure it," he said, and left the chamber, and he of the key followed.

The Dark Lady resumed her conversation. "I am, as thou hast most likely gathered from thy masters, about to match my grandchild with the earl. This may change his mode of life considerably; and, instead of the wild and adventurous career so lately before him, when he lacked lands and castle, another has unexpectedly opened. This change, Hubert, may not suit thy spirit and enterprise. I have more gallyes than I can well look to: we get old apace, and need a bustling assistant. Thou, or fame belies thee, art a choice seaman; — if thou leavest the earl's service, how say you to take on with the Lady of Doona? Thou shalt have her best galley, a good steed, a corner of the board, and name thy guerdon to boot."

The squire bowed. — "Thanks, noble dame, for this confidence; and if I change service, I shall not refuse so good a proffer; — but I am almost weary of these Irish wars. There is neither wealth nor glory to be won; and I have some thoughts of seeking fortune in foreign seas, and, with a bold band and a stout vessel, see if gold be as plenty on the Spanish main, as Raleigh's followers have told."

As Hubert spoke, the sewer returned with his lantern, and the Lady, followed by the squire and Duncan of the Key, descended to the vaults, in which many a cask of rare and costly wine was deposited. There was no apparent opening in the extensive cellars, and the party were returning, when the Lady observed an oaken door in the angle of the remotest of the vaults.

"Whence leads that door?" she said to the cellarer.

"That question your honourable ladyship can best solve, as I, and he who carried these keys before me, ever considered that it was some place reserved for other purposes than storing wine; — but it was no duty of ours to ask its contents."

"Ha! — this, Hubert — this, indeed, looks as if there was some foundation for the tale. Break me it open instantly." The door, though originally of considerable strength, was nearly rotten from the dampness of the place. The cellarer procured a crow-bar, and, with joint exertions, Duncan of the Key and his companions forced it off its rusted hinges. With lighted torches, Hubert proceeded along a narrow passage partly hollowed

in the rock, and partly arched with masonry. It led directly to the cliffs outside the castle, its entrance being almost closed up with stones and sea-weed, which, from disuse, had accumulated so much as nearly to conceal the passage. But, its existence known, a very short time would have sufficiently cleared it to admit the murderous band, who, thus having gained access to the very centre of the fortress, weakly guarded as it was, would, with little difficulty, have succeeded in surprising the inmates and putting its feeble garrison to the sword.

"Come, sir squire, this is a new debt we owe thee — an thou go'st on thus, were you to burn our whole fleet we must pardon it. See, Duncan, that the entrances of this outlet be securely built up, and that too without delay. Come, we rarely visit thy crypts, cellarer — and, in courtesy, thou canst do no less than offer us a glass of thy best Bourdeaux."

Instantly the delighted functionary, who was rarely accustomed to so much condescension, produced a cobwebbed flask. The Dark Lady tasted the wine he filled into a rude drinking-horn; then handing it to Hubert, who in turn delivered it to Duncan of the Key, she ascended the narrow stair, accompanied by the squire, leaving the cellarer and his guest of the gate, to finish their flagon leisurely.

"Farewell," said the Dark Lady — "we meet an hour hence in the hall." The squire bowed, and they separated.

CHAPTER XXIV.

With evening, the scattered bands, who had gone in pursuit of the fugitives, began to return. A few prisoners were brought in, and some others of the dispersed rebels had fallen from the violence of the Dark Lady's retainers, or in unavailing attempts at resistance or escape. But of the leaders, Tyrone and the Red Hand, no intelligence was received; and the chance of their apprehension now rested with the lady's foster-brother and a body of light cavalry, which had not yet returned to the tower. The escape of O'Neal, when communicated to the Lord Deputy, appeared to be a sad disappointment. The total dispersion of the rebel band was but of trifling importance compared with the arrest or destruction of that dangerous and talented chieftain; and, by the singular fortune which seemed to attend Tyrone even in his most disastrous moments, it was to be dreaded that even now he would evade pursuit, and, ere long, reappear, as he had often done before, stronger after signal defeats. As a true subject to his queen, her Deputy of Connaught regretted the escape of her arch-enemy at a time when his destruction appeared to be inevitable; and, no doubt, he felt personally chagrined, that himself had not been the happy means of delivering into the hands of his mistress, a traitor who had foiled her ablest commanders, and been the indirect cause of bringing her unhappy favourite Essex to the scaffold.

Nor was the Dark Lady less annoyed. She, too, would have felt no little pride had the riders and visiters of Doona been the instruments of removing the ablest and most formidable enemy the English government had ever to contend against. However, regret was unavailing; — the gate-horn sounded — the prickers, who had been most anxiously expected, rode into the court-yard; and although the condition of their jaded horses proved how long and unabated their exertions must have been, the result was alike unfortunate: the rebel leader had escaped, and not a trace of himself or of the Red Hand could be discovered during their tedious and extended search.

The hour of festivity approached — already lights sparkled from the lofty

casements of the hall; and the increased confusion in the court-yard, where server and cook were observed in busy occupation, announced that the banquet would be presently served. Arrayed in a new and costly robe of murrey-coloured velvet, with which the rich strings of Indian pearls that encircled her neck and arms fitly contrasted; a rosary of immense value at her girdle, and — strange companion to the blessed relic! — a poignard of elaborate workmanship beside it, preceded by her seneschal and attended by a new page, the Dark Lady presented herself to the Lord Deputy and the knights, to offer some courteous attentions before the feasting should commence. This formal visit was, of course, most graciously acknowledged; and Sir Richard and his hostess appeared mutually delighted in an interchange of civilities. The knights had been conversing some time apart, when the master of horse, advancing to the Ban Oussel, inquired if he might venture at that moment to intrude upon her with a trifling concern, inasmuch as the affair had only reference to himself.

The Dark Lady stopped him with a gracious smile. — "Oh no, sir knight, we must not permit anything in which the gallant master of horse is interested to be called a trifle. — Wilt thou proceed?"

"Lady," said Montravers, "it may, in the confusion of the morning, have escaped your recollection, that I have asked a boon, and that my claim has been acknowledged?"

"We are not," returned the Ban Oussel, "so very forgetful of gallant deeds, as thou wouldst infer, sir knight, not to remember that we made a conditional promise, which we now admit has been fully achieved, and consequently is most justly due. And now, Lord Deputy, I shall have a steed or a cast of hawks to part with, I foresee, ere long."

"Thou shalt have neither taken by me," replied Montravers — "thou hast a page, noble dame —"

"A page! — why, what means the master of horse? By the mass! we thought of thee far differently. We took thee for a bustling soldier, to whom a sturdy yeoman or a stout esquire were better suited than the useless attendant upon a woman's idleness. — Nay, you would not rob us of our page, sir knight?"

"Lady," said Montravers, "I have preferred a request — it is for thee to grant or refuse it. This is the boon I claim."

"Pshaw!" replied the Ban Oussel. — "Thou hadst far better leave us our idle boy. You praised the chesnut barb that carried you so well today. Be advised, and choose him. The steed will suit the knight, the boy will only cumber him."

"Well, noble dame, I have made my request," said the master of horse, somewhat piqued at the way in which his demand was evaded, — "I will not have the steed — and —"

"Montravers," exclaimed the Dark Lady, interrupting him, "as we are here with none beside us but the Lord Deputy and thy noble friend, I guess thy meaning in pressing for the boon we promised. The page we care not for; but we had other designs for thee. We are arrived at that time of life when we would prop our weakness by some goodly alliances with men who could hold our possessions, and leave us, when age comes on, more leisure to turn our thoughts to other matters than worldly ones. Montravers, we know thee for a bold and faithful gentleman; and we have already determined, if thou wilt not object, to wed thee with one in whose prosperity we are deeply interested, and whose portion shall be but second to our own grandchild and heiress."

"Stop, Ban Oussel," said the master of horse, "I must at once inform thee, that much as your intention towards me conveys a good opinion that I poorly merit; yet, alas! to accept thy offer, would be impossible; I am already otherwise attached."

The Dark Lady smiled; "Come, sir knight, 't is a mere passing fancy, one that will likely change, aye, ere the full moon wanes. Didst thou out know the bride designed for thee; — she is young, handsome, wealthy,— but thou must see her?"

"No, no, Ban Oussel; I would not the lady were subjected to such a slight, — I have no heart to give her, — and I trust I am too good a knight, thus circumstanced, to offer her a hand."

"Wilt thou not see her? She is already in the castle," continued the Dark Dame.

"I pray you, lady, permit me to decline the interview. — 'T were useless, and would annoy us both. I feel your goodness, but cannot avail me of your offer."

"And to oblige me, — wilt thou not at least see her?" asked the Dame with a gracious smile.

"Come, Ralph," said Fitzgerald, "as the Lady desires it, thou must surely thus far pleasure her."

The master of the horse bowed a reluctant consent, and continued,

"Noble Dame, if thou wouldst, indeed, confer the best boon within thy gift, I would claim thy page."

"Tush, sir knight! dost thou imagine for a moment that we would refuse thee such a trifle. Nay, we would gratify thee freely; but, by our honour, the page has left our service, and never within the walls of this castle shall he be seen again."

"How mean you lady?" — and the knight's brow darkened.

The Ban Oussel whispered her seneschal, whom she had summoned; he bowed and retired. "I mean, sir knight, precisely as I speak. The page I have for ever parted with, so far as attendance upon me is concerned, and I have bestowed him on the lady I had intended for thy bride; so therefore, all difficulty is at an end, and thou may'st have bride and boy together. — But, she comes, and I shall be judged by this gallant earl and our noble guest, whether, with a brave dower, this lady should be so uncourteously rejected."

The door opened, and, covered by a white veil, that almost reached her feet, the intended consort of the reluctant master of horse stopped within a few paces of the cavaliers.

"Thou art here, fair damsel, I grieve to say, upon a bootless errand;" said the Dark Dame, as she took the stranger's hand, "I would have given thee to yonder knight, but 'fore God, he will have nothing from us but a malapert boy that we have now no claim upon. Come hither, Montravers, thou must thyself reject the lady, for, by the mass! I cannot find the words."

Leading the veiled stranger forward, the Dame, turning to the casement, left her and the knight together. But he seemed in no haste to commence the task the Ban Oussel had assigned him. He stood in pitiable confusion, with his eyes averted to the floor, while a smile was interchanged between the Dark Lady and Fitzgerald. "Gerald," she continued, "I fear thy friend has suffered in the morning's fray, and has foolishly concealed the hurt, which I guess must be somewhere near the brain, for sight and tongue have failed him totally. As he assisted thee when thy horse was killed, wilt thou, in turn, render him now good service. He is sorely confounded too, methinks, for one who can cleave a skull, and use a rapier passing well."

Fitzgerald approached where the lady and the knight were standing. "Now out upon thee, Ralph, for a blind buzzard; with thy leave, fair dame we will, at least, let this modest knight see the features of the woman he rejects."

As the veil fell, the master of horse raised his eyes slowly. "Saints and angels!" he exclaimed, "what means this?"

"Nay, sir knight, if thou wilt refuse our offer, we trust at least, thy temper will not fail, and lead thee to do it uncourteously," said the Ban Oussel.

"Florence! my own sweet Florence, — and is it thou!" said Montravers, as he caught her to his breast.

"Why, here's a miracle!" said the Ban Oussel. "And is the page so soon forgotten?"

"Only for the page's sister," cried the knight. "Lady of Doona, wilt thou, indeed, grant me this boon?"

"Aye, Montravers, with all our soul — and add the chesnut to the gift But, Florence, thy will must be consulted. Wilt thou have this good knight for thy liege lord and master? You hesitate — no wonder, wench — mine was the quieter service; and if you will not venture thyself within the power of a strange cavalier, say but the word; jerkin and hose are still at hand, and I shall take back my page again."

But Florence, even at the proposal, although in jest, of parting from Montravers, had crept closer to the master of the horse. "And thou wilt leave doublet and mistress both? Well, be it so, thou ingrate! and as we have another matter to arrange, wilt thou once more do my bidding, and to this good knight will I then resign thee for the future? Go, tell Inez we would see her directly in this chamber, as we would present our heiress to our noble guest."

The beautiful girl left the apartment; and Montravers, approaching the Ban Oussel Dhu, bent upon his knee, and taking her hand, kissed it respectfully, as he offered her his manly but heartfelt acknowledgments. The Lady was not unmoved: — "I have made two persons happy," she muttered, "and surely this is reward enough. But here comes our most rebellious heiress, who will only wed when and whom she pleases."

As she spoke, Inez de Burgo, accompanied by the quondam page, advanced to the centre of the chamber. Obediently to the expressed wishes of her grand-dame, she was richly and most becomingly attired. A robe of white silk displayed the fine proportions of her perfect form, while a rich plume waved over her beautiful hair, which sparkled with the costly jewels the Dark Lady had presented. Conscious that her lover was beside her, and that she was in the presence of a stranger, and under the reproving eye of her stern relative, she felt embarrassed and confused; and while the downcast eye and blushing cheek were turned from the stranger's gaze, Fitzgerald thought he had never seen her loveliness before.

"I would present, noble Lord, our sole relative and heiress to thee," said the Dark Dame, as she led Inez forward to the Deputy of Connaught and, according to the custom of the times, Sir Richard saluted the trembling girl.

"Thou art aware, my noble guest, already, of what our intentions *were*. We hoped to have seen our child united to a brave and honoured knight; and, while we placed a coronet upon her brow, we would have given to her husband the richest bride without the pale. But other feelings have induced her to decline the honourable alliance we had intended; and, as we would not dispose her hand contrary to her inclinations, we must abandon our purpose. — Inez, I would not, in the presence of the Lord Deputy, speak of an affair so unpleasant to us both, but that I pledged my word to thy noble suitor that his rejection should come from thy own lips, and that this good company should witness it. Thou askedst thy suitor's name last night — 't is the earl of Kildare. Will this knowledge induce thee to change what was probably a rash and hasty determination? Speak fearlessly."

Inez raised her eyes for a moment, stole one glance at Fitzgerald, and

encouraged by his smiles, in a low but firm voice replied, "It will not, honoured dame."

"And has the earl no hopes of winning the fair maiden?" inquired the Lord Deputy, as he took her hand.

"None, my good Lord, whatever," was the calm reply.

"He was once thy bosom friend, Fitzgerald; — wilt thou not plead for him? and possibly the lady might change her purpose," said Montravers, with a smile.

"I should be a sorry advocate," replied the tall knight, as he advanced, and took the hand which the queen's deputy had resigned. "Inez, would my entreaty be of any avail, when thy noble relative and the queen's deputy have failed? If I could say aught for Kildare, I would plead for him, by heaven! as strongly as if the suit were my own!"

"How mean you, sir knight?" and the fair girl started and turned an inquiring eye upon her lover.

"I mean, my beloved Inez, that I am as deeply interested for the Earl of Kildare, aye, as for my very self," replied Fitzgerald."

Again Inez bent her eyes upon the knight; she saw him gaze upon her with the tenderest interest, she felt the pressure of his hand.

"What means this mystery? — Speak, dearest Gerald, I cannot comprehend how thou shouldst persuade me to wed another?"

"Nor would I, my sweet love. — Gerald and Kildare are both before thee, and thou mayst choose of them whom thou wouldst have."

"And art thou Earl of Kildare, Gerald?"

"I am, my beloved one, — and thy poor knight's bride shall one day wear the coronet of a countess;" and, embracing her with tenderness, he presented her as his affianced wife to the lord deputy.

"Nay, not so fast! I have her refusal, and that from her own lips too. I told thee, last night, that thou shouldst wed an earl," said the Ban Oussel, with a smile.

Leaving her lover's side, Inez advanced and knelt at the Dark Lady's feet. Gently the noble dame raised her up, and, folding her to her breast, she blessed her with an ardour that appeared, in one so stern and passionless, the more extraordinary. "God protect thee, my beloved child! — and may thy married state be as happy, and far more permanent than mine." Then, turning to the lord deputy, she said, "My noble guest, this will be a busy day, when all we have gone through is reckoned, and, as you spoke of leaving us to-morrow, I would solicit that, for one day, thou wouldst postpone thy journey, and honour a double bridal with thy presence. Nay, Inez, in this at least I shall claim obedience; and, hark! 'tis the summons to our poor entertainment. — Come, my good lord — Wilt thou in charity look to me? for, in good truth, both my gallants have deserted." Leading the way with the queen's deputy, and preceded by seneschal and servants with their wands of office, the Lady of Doona descended in full state to the castle-hall, while, with the "ladies of their love," the young knights followed her, and the banquet proceeded.

CHAPTER XXV.

The hall of Doona had witnessed many a scene of splendid festivity, but within its ancient walls never was guest more nobly entertained than her Majesty's Lieutenant of Connaught. The spacious apartment was, on this eventful evening, magnificently arranged. Table and sideboard were loaded with massive plate, while silver services, interspersed among

the armour and weapons, with which the walls were covered, shed a chastened light that well befitted the baronial state of the proud lady.

Flattered in having the representative of royalty at her board — flushed with the morning's success, and more delighted still at the union she had so happily concluded between the lovely Inez and the heir of the Geraldines, the Ban Oussel's eye brightened as she looked around. The lord deputy was placed beside her, and him, by a double act of loyalty and personal service, she had made her fast friend. She glanced at her beautiful grand child; — and could those peerless charms, as she listened with sparkling eyes and glowing cheeks to her gallant lover, do otherwise than delight even the Dark Lady, heedless as she was to what woman estimates so dearly? — And there, too, was her noble son-in-law; and with a mother's pride she gazed on the young earl, and blessed her patron saint for vouchsafing her so brave a successor. Nor did she want self-congratulation in looking at the master of horse, and his mistress, the pseudo-page. In him she had secured a bold and faithful ally, while her heart whispered she had done besides an act of reparation to one who had strong claims upon her justice.

The banquet ended, the tables were cleared, and wine and music succeeded. Several minstrels of high repute had accompanied the island-chiefs; who, holding their lands in feudal tenure from the Dark Lady, had obeyed the signal for assistance, and hurried to her relief with their clansmen and retainers. Many a harp poured forth its wild melody to hail a banquet that celebrated alike victory and successful love; but Inez whispered to Fitzgerald that none were half so sweet as his who lay upon the battle-field; and with the recollection of Emmeein au Knock, the crimes of the rebel were all forgotten in the minstrel's skill.

It was at this time the Ban Oussel first observed that Hubert was not among the guests. Remarking his squire's absence to the knight, she expressed her fears lest sudden indisposition had prevented him from appearing in the hall, and despatched an attendant to ascertain the cause. Quickly the messenger returned. Hubert, he announced, had been called to the castle-gate by a stranger, with whom, after a brief conference, he had immediately departed.

"Now, by our Lady!" exclaimed the dame to the master of horse, "this same comrade of thine is the most extraordinary personage we have ever known. What think you, my noble guest?" she continued, addressing Sir Richard Bingham, "this skipper, or squire, apprized us of a weakness in our own hold! aye, in this very tower, — of which we were before utterly unacquainted. By heaven! I would have supposed the tale an idle coinage of some knave's brain, had I not satisfied myself that it was a reality — by personal inspection. This Hubert sadly perplexes us; — and one would almost swear he had special assistance from Sathanas himself."

"*Conserva me, Domine!*" muttered a thick and pursy voice from the centre of the table.

"Ha!" said the Dark Lady, "the voice of our reverend confessor, if our ears be true: — So, sir priest, have you recovered wind and courage enough to bring thee to the hall? Little wot ye, my Lord Deputy, how much you are indebted for safety to yonder churchman, who, alack! from fleshly mortification and continued abstinence, is wasted to the atomy you behold him. Certes, our rescue had been wholly unavailing, but for the prompt and clear intelligence this holy man gave us, touching your instant peril."

"Honoured dame," replied the monk, "I do confess my intellect was somewhat dull, and I did mistake Hubert's directions a trifle; — but we are all mortal: — *Beatus vir qui non abiit!*"

"Truce with thy Latin, and keep thy learning for the cloister!" exclaim-

ad the Dark Lady, interrupting the holy man, with small regard for his religious calling. "Think, my good Lord, in place of notifying thy danger to us, he had the audacity to require us to meet the squire alone! — aye, and in the forest too."

"I was sorely alarmed, gracious Lady," said the churchman. "Cataranes and spoilers are my aversion: — *Iniquos odio habui;* — and to be within earshot of a band of knaves, and hear them arranging to cut every throat in Doona! Holy Anthony! my blood curdles when I think of it. *Eripe me de inimices!* But if I ever be caught in green wood after sun goes down again —" and he began fumbling for his rosary.

"An it be thy black beads you look for, gossip," said the ommadawn, from his low seat beside the fire — "you 'll find them with the miller's wife. I trow you forgot them in the hurry, when ye saw the clown returning from the village, a full hour before the pious dame expected him."

Worowski's remark occasioned a laugh at the churchman's expense, who felt evidently annoyed, that the noble knights should see his sanctity made subject for a fool's jest; and tartly answered, "Thy wisdom forgets, Ommadawn, that there be other black beads beside mine: — but, *dixit insipiens*, point thy stakes more, and thy wit less, Worowski."

But the altercation between the monk and fool was quickly terminated. The hall door opened, and the bustle at the bottom of the table announced that way was being made for a person of honour. Every eye was turned from the dais, where the ladies and knights were seated, to see who the late visiter might be; when a young cavalier, richly dressed, advanced slowly up the chamber, and the well-known person and features of the esquire told that it was Hubert himself.

"Ha!" exclaimed Fitzgerald, "our trusty friend, and gallant squire!"

"Friend, noble earl, if you will allow him the honour, but squire no longer;" and Hubert bowed.

"And have we lost thy good services?" replied the tall knight, "when there were some hope we might have made a better master than a houseless cavalier who lately landed from the Jolly Tar?"

"Thanks, my good lord," returned the quondam esquire.

"I trust thou art not about to leave us, Hubert?" said the Ban Oussel. — "Hast thou weighed our offer well, and wilt thou remain in the old tower?"

"No, gracious lady — I will never take service more. I come here, Lady of Doona, for justice." And he looked upon the dame with a steady and penetrating glance.

"We owe thee that, without any claim upon our private consideration," said the Ban Oussel. — "But thou hast done us noble service, and more than common justice shalt thou have."

"Lord Deputy," Hubert continued, "I served thee at thy need — wilt thou add a boon to what the lady promises?"

Sir Richard quickly answered, "Aye, that I will, by the honour of a true soldier!"

"Noble Earl, have I any claim upon thee?" Fitzgerald bowed assent. "Master of the horse, wilt thou assist one who has been a faithful comrade?"

"Aye, Hubert, by a knight's word I will, even did it affect my neck, provided it touches not mine honour."

"'T is well; our suit bids fair to prosper, for even this learned divine is busy, no doubt in holy exercise on our behalf;" and he pointed to the monk, who from the moment he had seen Hubert approach the dais, had betaken himself hastily to his devotions.

The Dark Lady had watched the passing scene with interest, and not without some appearance of impatience; and now, with her customary cold and haughty tone, she begged the esquire to favour the good company with his demands.

"Justice, my Lord Deputy, for a faithful subject to the Queen; — justice, Lady of Clare Island, for the descendant of Macmahon, and the rightful heir of Doona!" was the unexpected reply.

Had a thunderbolt struck the tower, or a shell exploded in the hall, the lady and her guests could not have evinced greater astonishment. The Ban Oussel's, however, was but momentary; rage succeeded her surprise, and springing from her chair of state, she exclaimed in a voice that made many a bold heart quail, "Who dares question our title to Doona?"

There was a moment's silence, when Hubert raised his eyes, until they settled on the Dark Lady's ominous glance, and then, in a steady tone, replied — "*I do* — Lady of Clare Island — *I, Maurice Macmahon.*"

The words had hardly passed his lips, ere up sprang twenty islanders, and as many middoges were instantly unsheathed. One wild chief raised his arm to stab the daring stranger, when the ommadawn struck it down. The ladies screamed — the knights leaped from their seats astounded, — and the hall presented a picture of confusion and coming bloodshed, when, with a wave of her arm, and a voice of thunder, the Lady of Doona commanded that all should resume their places. The orders were obeyed, the knights, casting looks of mutual astonishment at each other, sat down; and the islanders more slowly took their seats, each, however, sticking his naked weapon in the table before him. "What!" shouted the Ban Dunagha, "what means this tumult? — Sheath every middoge! The man who strikes a blow within this hall, by my father's ashes! shall never strike another. The tone with which she spoke appalled the boldest of her wild clansmen, and instantly every middoge disappeared, and a deep stillness pervaded the assembly before so fierce and clamorous.

"We were wrong ourself, young man, to let thy bold and idle declaration hurry us into passion. Proceed, and we will hear you with what patience we can muster. What mean ye?"

"To thee, lady," returned the young Macmahon, "neither scathe nor insult. Ban Oussel! had I been your enemy, would this hall at midnight have been the scene of bridal feasting? No, dame, thou wouldst have been a corpse, thy child been doomed to insult, thy followers slain, thy coffers rifled, thy house an outlaw's hold."

"Go on — we do believe thee, Hubert," said the Dark Lady, in a softened voice.

"Lady, had I wished to harm thee — and many a time vengeance whispered me to do it — there were little to have prevented the deed. I have been beside thee in this tower — thou hast walked upon the rampart when I was near enough to have sped thee with a bullet; — you have passed the brake when I sheltered in the forest, and thy mantle brushed the leaves of the very bush which afforded me concealment."

"Hubert, on my soul's hope! I do acquit thee of every evil design against our person; but," continued the Ban Oussel, "thy birth is doubtful, thy right of succession a farce. This hall is mine by conquest, and years have sufficiently elapsed to bar thy claim, even were thy strange tale true."

"Of its truth, and that I am the only son of Barbara Macmahon, there be sufficient evidences, even in this tower, lady. So-ho! priest! is not thy office ended yet? 'Fore God! thou art devout enough latterly for an anchorite. Lay thy rosary aside. Hast thou any recollection of us, holy father? And thou, Worowski — come, look not upon the ground, gossip — the noble dame will never blame thee for fidelity to the orphans of thy earliest benefactors. Old man! canst thou speak to our being what we say?" and Hubert turned to the aged minstrel, who nodded his venerable head. "But lady, thyself shall be our witness. Remember ye any mark that the boy who so strangely disappeared had on his person?"

The lady paused. — "Yes," she replied; "and were there one deadliest

enemy, we will speak the truth. There was a deep scar near his shoulder occasioned, if my memory serve, by the bite of a savage wolf-dog."

Hubert advanced, and turning his doublet up, bared his right arm, which showed an indelible scar.

"It is the same; and I acknowledge thee to be the person whom thou dost assert thyself. What wouldst thou next? I would not wrong thee, sir. We'll leave thy claim to the lord deputy's decision."

"Nay, lady, to that I must object," said Hubert, with respectful firmness.

The queen's lieutenant coloured.—"And dost thou doubt our impartiality, young man?" he asked hastily.

"No, my good lord, I mean thee no offence; for who has not heard of Sir Richard Bingham's inflexible justice? Did we require one to do us right, to none before the queen's lieutenant would we appeal; but here, noble lord, 't is needless. The Ban Oussel herself shall be our judge, and from her own hand alone will we receive our rights."

The Dark Lady seemed unusually affected. Conflicting passions strove a moment for the mastery; but her better feelings conquered;—and springing from her seat, she advanced some paces towards the descendant of the Macmahons.—"Hubert, come hither:" the youth advanced—"Wilt thou bury all past feuds and bitter recollections, and be faithful to me and mine, as I shall be just and true to thee?"

"Lady, I will," returned the youth.

"Rise, and thus perish every memory of the past. She put her arms round his neck, and kissing his cheek affectionately, resumed her seat again, and in a wonderfully short time regained her self-possession. The lord deputy and the knights testified their delight at the happy termination of what had threatened disastrous consequences at the outset; and many a hand clasped the young Macmahon's in the grasp of friendship, which a few minutes before had bared the murderous dagger.—"And now, good Hubert—for I must call thee by that name till I get used to thy true title," said Sir Richard—"tell me where and under what circumstances we met before, for thy voice and face are to me no strangers."

"What, my good lord, and hast thou so soon forgotten Hans Jansen?"

"Impossible; thou art not the Hollander from whom we had our surest information of the rebel movements?" returned the queen's deputy.

"Aye, marry, and none other," replied the quondam squire. "Nay, I may at once end the mystery; and by making a clean breast, confess my sins against our good queen and the noble Lady of Doona together. Come, monk,"—for the priest groaned audibly,—"fear not; thy treason will this time escape the noose; for by our Lady! there 's not a rope within the tower would bear thy weight, unless there be a galley's hawser in the building."

"And," said the Dark Lady, with affected displeasure, "has that fat sinner, who for life has been a heavier draught upon our cellar than a round dozen of our riders,—has that holy porpoise played us false?"

"Aye, that he has, lady; his own pious hands slung me from the window the night I left this castle so mysteriously. But, to say truth, whether from fear, or a twinge of conscience, he almost let slip the cord; and had I followed his good counsel, I might have been in time as fat and holy as himself; for he consigned me to the abbot of Ballintubber, where, for half a score years, I learned to read and write, tell my beads, change trenchers, toll the bell, and, no doubt, would have become an accomplished churchman—had not a wild rover, who came to us one winter night, with a cracked crown, rewarded the monks for curing him, by persuading their neophytes to leave the cloister for the ocean.

"'T is useless telling how I sped; years passed—the youth became a man, and the cabin-boy a skipper. I became connected with that false

villain, Tyrone. I served him well and faithfully; and when I had become too deeply in his secrets for his safety, he thought it full time to pay off my claim with a slit windpipe. I found out his intentions, and happily saved my throat, and that, too, without O'Neal suspecting that I even harboured a suspicion of his treachery. From that moment I became his most devoted enemy; and you, Lord Deputy, can best tell how many of his plots Hans Jansen spoiled."

"Aye, faith, I can, good Hans or Hubert. Were I but certain that the villain were no more, or that I had him in my power, I would count it the noblest news I ever told my queen. Alas! that the traiter's fortune should snatch him from our vengeance."

"It is a pity," said Macmahon. "And have the Lady's riders found no trace of him?"

"None, my brave friend," said the Ban Oussel: "would that they had; it would be a proud offering, from our poor hands to our royal mistress, the carcass of a living traitor, or the head of a dead one."

"'T is very strange he should have thus escaped us," continued the Macmahon. "I bethink me, that some followers of mine surprised a fellow who was trying to get from this place by sea. We 'll question him, for I suspect him to be a kinnahan of the rebel earl."

"Followers of thine, Hubert," said the Dark Lady, in surprise.

"Why, in truth, Ban Oussel, the Jolly Tar arrived in the bay to-night;—but wilt thou permit her to keep company with thy galleys, lady?" said the schipper.

"Aye, and she shall be right welcome;—but will she keep the peace,—nor wet again our pennant?" returned the dame with a smile.

"For that I 'll answer," said Fitzgerald.

"Then the sooner she anchors the better," replied Macmahon. "Up, Ommadawn, place the monk's lamp, as thou knowest how, in the arrow-slit of his cell, and the Jolly Tar will soon round the point."

"So-ho! more treason, my Lord Deputy; the priest's corpulence saved his neck; I know nothing to shield the fool."

"Come, lady, let it be a general amnesty;—Worowski's good service this morning deserves a pardon for past offences," said the queen's lieutenant.

"Then be it so, for I verily believe, that in all else the fool was faithful. Go, sirrah, and make the signal;—thou knowest the trick of it right well. Come, gallant gentlemen, I pray ye spare not the wine-butt; our cellar fears ye not; and while Hubert is away we 'll hear the harp again."

At the bidding of the Dark Lady, Ulic a Neilan * rose, and approaching the elevated bench near the dais, from which the minstrels poured forth their simple melodies, he placed himself beside the instrument, touched the chords carelessly for a moment,—and after a wild prelude, sang the following "unpremeditated lay."

Give me the harp, my love, and when
My finger strikes each golden string,
Let fancy bring me back again
The dream of bliss that bless'd life's spring—

But if the thought of happier hour,
Recall one pang of wild regret—
Then, harp, exert thy magic power,
And teach this bosom—to forget.

The symphony of the island-bard had ended, when the hall-portal unclosed, and the crowd giving way, Hubert, followed by a stranger, advanced.

* Ulic of the Island.

"Is this the prisoner?" asked the lady, bending her piercing glance upon the tall figure who accompanied Macmahon.

"It is, noble dame, and, if I err not, he may give us some tidings of the runaway," was the reply.

"Come forward, fellow!" exclaimed Montravers; "Doff thy cloak, and for once speak truly. Where parted ye from the traitor last?—speak, or it may fare the worse with thee;" but the stranger preserved a dogged silence, regardless of the threats of the master of horse.

"Hast thou not ears?" cried the Lady of Doona. But without answering the interrogatories of dame or knight, the prisoner rushed forward, and, throwing himself at the feet of the Ban Oussel, he murmured in a broken and subdued voice:—"Mercy! noble lady, mercy, for a wretched and a ruined man."

The dame rose, and looking at her suppliant with a glance of scorn, as he knelt before the dais with his face buried in his cloak—

"Good Hubert, wilt thou tell us who this grovelling fellow is? O'Neal's kinnahans were reputed men, and bold ones too. But for his bulk, I'd think my suppliant was a woman," and her lip curled in contempt.

Macmahon approached the kneeling figure. "Such as he is, it is my first present to the Ban Oussel," and tearing the stranger's disguise away, the knights exclaimed together—"It is the traitor himself!" while the abject earl clung to the very hassock of the dame as if to seek her protection.

"Villain! wouldst thou ask aught from me? Thou, who but for providential interferences, had deluged this floor with blood, and brought ruin and disgrace upon the sleeping inmates of my tower."

"Hubert—good Hubert!—I ever loved thee!" gasped the miserable man.

"Loved *me*, Lord Earl? aye, when ye gave the secret order to Black Maguire to stab me at the ford, and throw my body into the river. Oh! my good lord, I owe thee much, 't is true."

And was this squalid wretch he who had for so many years convulsed his native land, and placed the dominion of England in jeopardy, defeated her best generals, and brought the favourite to the block?—a more forlorn being never bent for mercy at the foot of woman, than the craven earl who clung to the Dark Lady's garment, and vainly strove to move her pity. His garments were soiled and torn, his face pale with hunger, and stained with gouts of blood, his eyes were sunken, his voice almost inarticulate.

"So-ho, Duncan!—Call me our warder," and immediately he of the key appeared.

"To the dungeon with this traitor! Look to him sharply, for if he escape your charge, hadst thou fifty necks, I would find for each a halter." Duncan of the Key gave a peculiar grin which expressed more than language.

"Lady, noble lady! I am dying from hunger, and tortured with thirst," cried the fallen earl.

"An thou wert the devil, thou shalt lack neither food nor wine in Doona. Hand him a cup of Bourdeaux."

Tyrone seized the stoup the servant offered, and finished the wine ere the vessel left his lips. "Bring him refreshments to his dungeon. Off with the rebel."

Her commands were promptly obeyed: when, rising from the table, she bade her honourable guests a fair good night, and, accompanied by the brides elect, retired, leaving the cavaliers to indulge in a deep carouse.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It was past midnight when the Lady of Doona retired from the banquet. The noble guests, the master of horse, and the young Macmahon, fatigued with the exertions of this busy day, left the hall immediately. But the island chiefs were in no hurry to quit the festive board. "Fast and furious" the carouse proceeded, and, for hours, their rude and joyous merriment disturbed the quiet of the castle, and told the more moderate of the lady's visiters, who had sought repose in vain, that their wild companions continued their noisy revelry. Presently, however, the debauch subsided — the harp was heard no longer — the lights vanished from the hall, and the old tower was wrapped in unbroken repose; for even the noisiest reveller, under the sovereign influence of fatigue and wine, slept soundly now upon his hard bed of heath and fern.

Hubert, when he left the lower chamber, hastened to the apartment where his sister had retired. A hurried greeting in the hall had only passed between the orphan relatives; — but here their feelings could be indulged without the restraint imposed upon them by the stranger's presence; and, as Macmahon held the gentle girl to his heart, from whom he had been alienated so long, nature claimed her tribute — and, firm and unyielding as the bearing was, of one who had been buffeted by the world, and schooled in adversity from the cradle, yet his tears mingled with those of his only relative, to whom he had been so tardily but fortunately restored.

"And must I lose thee, my Florence? — and my claim upon thy duty as thy protector cease ere noon?"

The page blushed deeply and was silent.

"It is truly a hard case, sir squire," replied Inez, who now approached them; "and I trow it would be unkind in thee, Florence, to leave a brother to whom thou hast so happily been united. I am but a sorry lawyer — but thy promise to the English knight cannot be binding. If thou wilt recall it, we 'll find a flaw in it; or, as the master of horse is a courteous gentleman, he will not surely hold thee to an obligation, given when you believed there was no inclination but your own to please." But the page's look by no means assented to the legal reasoning of her friend, and, with an affectionate good night, Hubert retired, and left the fair girls to their repose.

The second watch changed, and the sentries at the gate, and on the battlements of Doona, were relieved. The noise this military duty occasioned ceased, and a deep silence succeeded, only broken by the baying of the wolf-dog in the court, or the measured step of the warder on the tower. The castle was tranquil, and every light had disappeared save one, and that glanced from the casement of the Lady's chamber. She was still awake, for a tall shadow sometimes crossed the wall and met the view of a lonely sentry posted on the battery erected seaward, to command the anchorage of the galleys in the event of their being attacked from the ocean.

In her private chamber the Ban Oussel was seated at a table before a bright wood-fire, which from time to time she replenished with billets of split pine. A tall antique candlestick, furnished with an immense taper made of goat's tallow, shed a powerful light as she read over sundry documents which she appeared to have been engaged in writing. A map before her was frequently referred to, as she perused those papers separately. "They are correct," she muttered, "and lack nothing but seal and signature. What, ho! Kathleen! up, wench, and fetch our ring." By the person she

addressed slept on. "How sound youth slumbers!" said the Ban Oussel, as she rose and approached the mattrass on which the sleeping girl rested. She gazed for some moments upon the smiling features of her handsome attendant, while, in her usual mode, her own thoughts found utterance. "Poor wench!" she said, "I will not break those slumbers. Many a year has flown since sleep like this visited my weary lids; — but wherefore should she not sleep. *She* has no cares and fears to fret her thoughts and vex her quiet. She dreams now, perhaps, of what forms her chief anxiety when waking — the suit of some well-featured islesman, or, mayhap, the colour of her last kirtle. Is she not happy? — she is: for I, with five castles and fifty miles of sea-coast, envy her those placid slumbers, which never shall be mine again — I will not break them!" She turned from Kathleen's couch, procured the seal-ring she required, and applied the wax to the documents she had already prepared. "'T is done," she continued — "Inez is nobly dowered, and the young Macmahon has again received his own. My heart feels lighter, too — and a load, methinks, that used to press this bosom, is removed; — and shall to-morrow close my daring and turbulent career? — yes; — these last acts shall end it nobly. The worst enemy of England, — he who foiled Elizabeth so long, and placed her power at defiance, shall be landed at the traitor's gate of her own Tower, and the murderer of Essex be presented manacled to his repentant queen, from the hands of the Dark Lady of Doona. This will be a glorious termination to our public life; — and then for other cares, and those too of another world." She paced the chamber thoughtfully. "Yes, for the last time, I will consult it;" — and opening a curious cabinet strongly bound with brass, and secured by numerous fastenings, she took out a parchment, emblazoned with characters and signs of strange and mystic form. — "What says the old man's present?" — she read in a low and deliberate voice, "'*When thy prosperity is at the highest, then pause. Push thy good fortune nothing farther. Stop when the tide is at its spring; for remember, Grace O'Malley, the water that rises highest on the beach, recedes again the fastest.*' — And is my fortune at its flood, then? Let me consider that! — My grandchild wedded to the heir of the Geraldines, the haughty Earl of Kildare — Ireland could not match that union. The scourge of Elizabeth, the terror of England, a captive in my dungeon — that is a proud boast too. The queen's deputy my guest, — my hereditary foe my sworn ally." — She had approached the casement, as the gray light of morning struggled feebly to penetrate its thick glass. She opened the lattice; the first sunbeam glinted on the ocean, and showed her fleet anchored under cover of the castle guns. She looked proudly on her numerous and well-appointed galleys, when her quick eye detected, in the very centre of her vessels, a foreign shallop, of mould and rigging very different from her own. The stranger was at anchor, and at the moment a breeze came curling from the westward, and displayed the broad ensign, which had before hung in sluggish folds from the mast-head of the galliasse, and on the pennon her own crest, the Flying Horse, was nobly blazoned. — "By heaven! *the hour is come!*" she exclaimed. "The Macmahon's bark rides in the middle of my galleys, and the cognizance of the O'Malleys floats over the deck of their hereditary enemy. I hail the omen. *The tide is at its spring.*" — She caught the mysterious scroll from the table, crumpled it with her hands together, and drawing a dark-coloured ring from her finger, cast both into the wood fire, which the morning breeze, admitted through the open lattice, had suddenly kindled up. The moment the ring and parchment touched the flame, a noise louder than the explosion of a petronel shook the building. The Dark Lady started back some paces, while Kathleen, with a wild scream, leaped from her couch; — a vapour of painful

and subtle quality filled the chamber — the taper was extinguished, and a fearful silence of some minutes' length ensued. But the lady soon recovered —"'Twas a pistolet that fired by accident in our hands," she said. "Open the casement wider, Kathleen; — aye, the fume subsides already. And now for our couch." With the assistance of her trembling attendant, the Ban Oussel was soon unrobed; and while the handsome girl muttered many an ave to the Virgin, her mistress threw herself upon the couch, and appeared to sleep directly.

Morning rose over the ocean, and a day of unusual brightness was ushered in. The troops expected by the Lord Deputy, with his chaplain and secretary, who accompanied him on his state visits, arrived betimes at Doona. There all was gay and busy preparation; and there was not an aching heart within the walls but one — and that was the fallen Tyrone's.

"He shall not mar our hilarity with his hateful presence," exclaimed the Dark Lady; "and on this high solemnity, there shall be no captive in our dungeon. Good Macmahon! off with him to our galley Give him in custody to Morteein More; and ere the sun sinks, he shall, as we have arranged already with the noble Deputy, be sent off in our best bark, a prisoner to the English queen."

The lady's orders were quickly obeyed and O'Neal, despatched by sea, safely reached his destination. But the rebel earl arrived too late to gladden the broken-hearted monarch. The arrow was too deep within her bosom to permit her to feel any gratification from the possession even of the enemy she hated most. Her wretched thoughts were occupied with one gloomy remembrance — one object was ever present to her harassed imagination — the scaffold to which her own false pride, and the malice of his secret foes, had devoted the loved and martyred Essex.

While the castle chapel was preparing for the celebration of the bridal rites, a summons from the Dark Lady requested the presence of the Lord Deputy in the hall, where the knights and Macmahon were already assembled. It was promptly obeyed, and immediately the Ban Oussel entered. She was dressed with unusual magnificence; and while every eye observed the costly ornaments she wore, it was remarked that the jewelled poignard was missing from her girdle, where nothing now appeared save a rich rosary of foreign workmanship. Her look was cheerful, her step light; and she paid the morning compliments with the courtesy that ever marked her manner when she was best pleased. She held some parchments in her hand, and, after a few minutes' general conversation, thus addressed the Lord Deputy:

"Sir Richard — we are unskilled in law, but we have inscribed our intents plainly upon these scrolls; and, as we accompany thee to Galway, we would entreat that these documents, under thine own eye, should there be put in fit and binding form."

Handing him the parchments, the Lord Deputy read them carefully.

"Thou hast indeed, lady," he said, "nobly provided for thy heiress; and thy pretty page and her gallant brother, I perceive, are not forgotten."

He gave the scrolls to the knights and Hubert. "Lady of Doona, this is indeed munificent," exclaimed Kildare; while the master of horse tendered his ardent acknowledgments. But Hubert would have returned the parchment. — "Nay, Lady of Doona, this is too much," he said, —"why leave the place that for so many years has been your home? — why return to Clare Island?"

"Maurice," said the Dark Lady, "hast thou read our wishes?"

"Yes, noble dame. The possessions of the Macmahons thou wouldst equally divide between me and Ralph Montravers," replied the youth.

"I would. My pretty page must be bravely dowered. Carrig-a-howla we give our heiress, with all our other lands and castles, save Clare Island; for *there* we will end our days, where their only happy and tranquil hours — few and far between — were spent. And now to the chapel! Come, lord deputy. — We 'll leave those laggard knights, with their coy dames, to follow us."

In a few minutes the Earl of Kildare and the master of the horse were kneeling, with their beautiful brides, before the altar. The ceremony was performed by Sir Richard's chaplain, the penal laws of the times making it indispensable that the marriage should be solemnized according to the ritual of the reformed faith. From the altar the noble company adjourned to the hall, where a banquet, suited to the joyous occasion, was served. With the evening tide, the lady's fleet weighed anchor, bearing the Ban Oussel and the Queen's Lieutenant to the port of Galway, whence Sir Richard's troops proceeded by land.

Of the future histories of the personages mentioned in this narrative, it is but requisite to say, that generally it was prosperous.

Sir Richard Bingham died in his government, universally regretted by all. His firmness and good discretion had made him an invaluable servant to his monarch; while his strict impartiality endeared him to the conquered, who too frequently experienced nothing from the English lieutenants but exaction and severity.

Kildare was shortly after restored to all his honours, and remained in high favour with James. His lovely countess was a frequent visiter at the English capital, and was justly ranked among the numerous beauties which the court of that easy-tempered monarch boasted.

Hubert, unsettled by the habits of early adventure, accompanied, with the Jolly Tar, a band of rovers to the Spanish Main. After many daring exploits, and the acquisition of much wealth, he sailed for his native land, but he never returned; and no doubt perished at sea with his whole crew.

Montravers proved what the Dark Lady had predicted — a bold and fortunate settler. He held his acquired possessions against every claimant; and steering with excellent discretion through the stormy sea of politics, he founded more than one noble house, and transmitted immense estates to his successors. Like his companion, Kildare, he saw himself surrounded by a numerous offspring: and the evening of both their lives was as calm and prosperous as the opening had been stormy and adverse.

But the Dark Lady's was the most extraordinary of those after-histories. Every thought of aggrandizement and ambition appeared to have been forgotten. Protected by her powerful relations and allies from all aggression, she turned her whole attention from sublunary concerns; and without becoming ascetic, the piety of her latter years singularly contrasted with the fierce and masculine tenor of her earlier career. She contributed munificently to every work of grace; and the ruins of the monastery in Clare Island, which she rebuilt, prove the extent of her charities. She died in the odour of sanctity, at an advanced age; and the exploits of *Grace O'Malley, the Dark Lady of Doona*, still form the theme of many a wild legend, with which the islanders of the western coast beguile the tedious hours of their long and stormy winter.

Of minor personages mentioned in this romance, the monk and the ommadawn ended their days in the walls of Doona. The churchman rarely left the hall or guard-room, for he became, from corpulence, unable to shrive even the miller's household. Worowski followed the bent of his wayward fancy unheeded, — rambling during sunshine in the green wood, and pointing stakes beside the fire in the kitchen, when "winter and rough weather" drove him in-doors from the forest.

"A month after this narration ends, Hubert and the knights, when hunting, discovered, in a remote dell, the body of a man, who was recognised to be the Red Hand. It was conjectured that the unhappy sufferer had escaped thus far from the field, which proved so fatal to his companions — and sinking under his wounds, dragged himself into the copse, and there perished, without friend or follower to assist him in his extremity.

Such was the wild tradition told me by the recluse of Clare Island, of the Ban Ousel Dhu.

THE END OF THE DARK LADY OF DOONA.